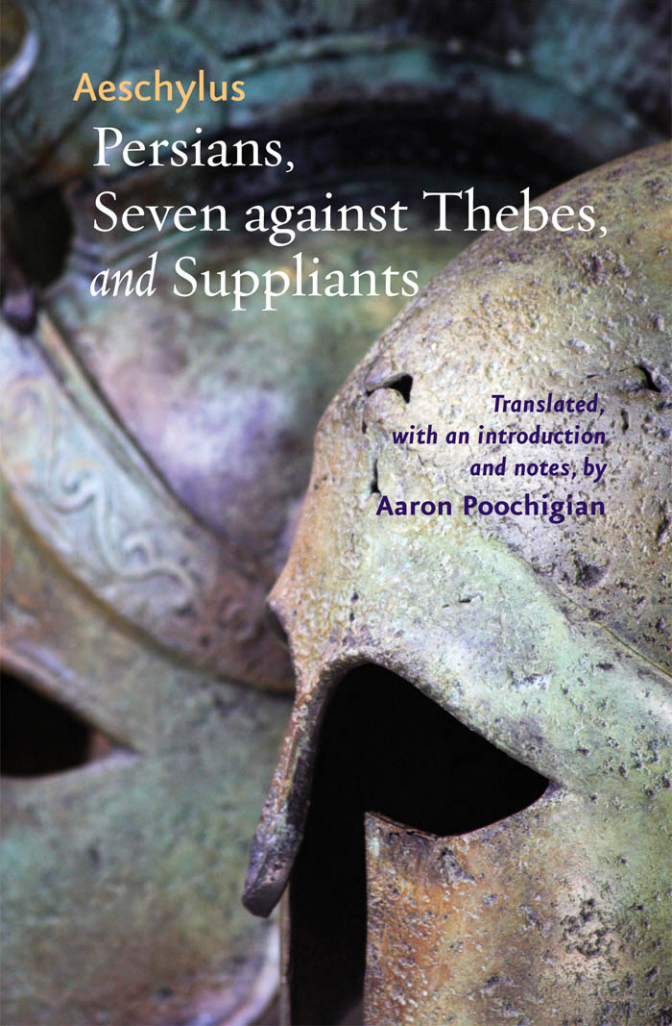
Aeschylus
Persians,
Seven against Thebes,
and Suppliants
Translated,
with an introduction
and notes, by
Aaron Poochigian

VISIT…

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Johns Hopkins
New Translations
from Antiquity

Aeschylus

Persians, Seven against Thebes, *and* Suppliants

Translated, with an introduction and notes, by Aaron Poochigian

The Johns Hopkins University Press
Baltimore

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The Johns Hopkins University Press
2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21218-4363
www.press.jhu.edu

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Aeschylus.
[Selections. English. 2011]
Persians ; Seven against Thebes ; and, Suppliants / Aeschylus ; translated, with an introduction and notes, by Aaron Poochigian.
p. cm. — (Johns Hopkins new translations from antiquity)
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN-13: 978-1-4214-0063-1 (hardcover : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 1-4214-0063-4 (hardcover : alk. paper)
ISBN-13: 978-1-4214-0064-8 (pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 1-4214-0064-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Aeschylus—Translations into English. 2. Greek drama (Tragedy)—Translations into English. 3. Mythology, Greek—Drama. I. Poochigian, Aaron, 1973– II. Aeschylus. Persae. English. III. Aeschylus. Seven against Thebes. English. IV. Aeschylus. Suppliants. English. V. Title.
PA3827.A655 2011
882′.01—dc22 2010043267

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Special discounts are available for bulk purchases of this book. For more information, please contact Special Sales at 410-516-6936 or specialsales@press.jhu.edu.

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For Nita Krevans

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Introduction

The Life of Aeschylus

Aeschylus was born circa 525 BC in Eleusis, a city fourteen miles from Athens and famous for its "Eleusinian" mystery rites in honor of Demeter and Persephone. His family, in addition to being aristocratic (eupatrid), was one of several prominent theatrical clans in Athens during the fifth century BC. Both of Aeschylus's sons were involved in the production of tragedies—one son, named Euphorion after his grandfather, went on to compose his own plays, and the other son, Euaion, most likely acted in them.[1]

A legend relating Aeschylus's poetic initiation has come down to us. We are told that, as a young man, he dozed off while guarding a vineyard. Dionysus then appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to write tragedies. Aeschylus began a play the next morning and "succeeded very easily."[2] He produced his first tragedy in 499 BC and his last circa 458. His body of work contained more than ninety plays, and he won first prize thirteen times at the Festival of Dionysus. Only six complete tragedies have come down to us. The three translated in this volume are the earliest: *Persians* was first performed in 472 BC, *Seven against Thebes* in the mid-460s, and *Suppliants* in 463. The remaining three plays constitute the *Oresteia* (458), the only complete trilogy of tragedies to have survived. We have fragments of roughly twenty other plays. *Prometheus Bound,* though traditionally attributed to Aeschylus, is now generally regarded as inauthentic.[3]

Aeschylus achieved an impressive military record. He fought in the battle of Marathon (490 BC), in which a greatly outnumbered band of Athenians and Plataians routed the Persian invaders back to their ships and out to sea. The historian Herodotus (484–425 BC) records the heroic death of Aeschylus's brother there: "After taking hold of an enemy ship by the ornament at the stern, Cynaegirus, the son of Euphorion, had his hand cut off by the blow of an axe and died."[4] Aeschylus also fought in the battle of Salamis (480 BC), perhaps as one of the heavily armed troops who routed the Persian nobles on the island of Psytalleia.[5] His description of the battle certainly has the vividness and detail of an eyewitness's account. Herodotus, in fact, uses it as a source.[6] We do not know for certain in what other battles Aeschylus took part, though he may have participated in the battle of Plataia as well.[7]

Late sources provide dubious accounts of legal troubles. We are told that, when the wooden grandstand at the theater collapsed sometime around 500

BC, Aeschylus was for some reason held responsible.[8] It is also alleged that he was convicted of revealing too much of the secret Eleusinian mysteries in a play.[9] Perhaps because of legal troubles, but more likely simply for profit, he at least twice traveled to Sicily, where he stayed at the court of Hieron, tyrant of Syracuse, who was also a patron of the poets Pindar and Bacchylides. On his first visit he composed a play commemorating Hieron's founding of the city of Aetna. He also staged a revival of *Persians* at Hieron's behest.[10] During his final visit to Sicily in 465–464 BC, he died at Gela.

A legend relating the manner of his death is as vivid as it is unlikely—it claims he was killed when an eagle mistook his bald head for a rock and dropped a tortoise on it to break the shell and expose the meat.[11] Aeschylus's epitaph (which may come from his own hand) omits his accomplishments as a tragedian and focuses exclusively on his participation in the battle of Marathon:

> This tomb contains the dust of Aeschylus,
> Euphorion's son and fruitful Gela's pride.
> Marathon knows his courage, and the long-haired
> Medes who learned it all too well.[12]

Within a few decades of his death, a decree was passed automatically granting a production at the Festival of Dionysus to anyone who would revive one of his plays.[13] He continued to be regarded as a model of patriotism and a moral authority during the heyday and decline of the Athenian Empire and beyond.

The Plays in This Volume

The plays translated in this volume adhere to the conventions we expect in Greek tragedy: in the original productions all the actors wore masks, a group of singers/dancers composed a chorus, the language was stylized, and the acting was presentational. As "early" tragedies, however, the plays do have distinctive features: (1) They were each first produced before the *skēnē* (a temporary wooden building facade) was in use at the Theater of Dionysus. Thus, none of the plays have the palace setting, which later came to be standard. None of them, therefore, makes use of a stage door, and all the entrances and exits are made by means of the *eisodoi* (paths leading to either side of the orchestra). (2) The chorus consisted of twelve members instead of the subsequently standard fifteen. (3) The plays abide by a two-actor rule—that is, the number of speaking actors is limited to two (excluding the chorus). These two actors, however, play a variety of characters.[14] In *Persians,* for example, one actor plays the queen and another the messenger and the ghost of Dareius (either actor could play Xerxes in the final scene).

Because of these limitations, there are no more than two speaking characters in any given scene, though the chorus leader and chorus do at times interject. In addition, mute extras playing servants, retainers, and armed guards attend important personages. For example, Eteocles, as king of Thebes, has an armed escort in *Seven against Thebes*. The members of this retinue eventually become the six Theban champions he sends, one by one, to face the Argive leaders.[15] In lines 1042–46 of *Suppliants,* Danaus even boasts of having acquired an armed escort from the Argives.

Even though two speaking actors were available, nearly all the drama in *Persians* and *Seven against Thebes* takes place between the chorus and a single actor—the Persian elders and the queen in the former and the Theban women and Eteocles in the latter. The second actor (the messenger and Dareius's ghost in *Persians* and the scout in *Seven*) does little more than introduce new information. In *Suppliants,* however, the latest of the three, we start to see the second actor engaging more in the action—the Egyptian herald, in fact, lays his hands on the Danaids and tries to drag them from the altar where they have claimed sanctuary. A third speaking actor was most likely introduced, along with the *skēnē* and the increase in the size of the chorus, in the late 460s or early 450s BC as part of a larger institutional reform.[16] Aeschylus uses three actors to great effect in the *Oresteia* of 458 and, in a remarkable and unparalleled move, even gives lines to an otherwise mute fourth actor in *Libation Bearers*.[17]

The three tragedies in this volume are also linked thematically. Each deals with the conflict between "authentic" Greeks and "barbarians," real or imagined. In *Persians* the court of King Xerxes is represented as effeminate, petty, and materialistic, while the Greeks are all cleverness and courage. In *Seven against Thebes* the Argive invaders are Greek but the chorus of Theban women claims they are *heterophōnoi* (foreign-speaking; 170 in Greek text, 152 in translation), and several Argive leaders utter sacrilegious threats and exhibit other "barbaric" practices. In *Suppliants* the dark-skinned daughters of Danaus and a party of dark-skinned sailors travel from Egypt to Argos. By dwelling at length on the exotic appearance of the Danaids, King Pelasgos calls attention to their otherness and reveals his own chauvinism and xenophobia:

> Ludicrous! that you foreigners descend
> Somehow from Argive stock. You look more like
> Libyan gypsies than our housewives here.
> The Nile might breed complexions such as yours;
> Or, rather, you could all have sat as models
> For Kyprian Aphrodite, the likeness stamped

On lovely statuettes by oversexed
Fondlers of marble. I hear the Bedouin girls
Are dark as you, who, seated pillion
On camels, fancy they are riding horseback—
They live out there somewhere near Aethiopia.
Had you been armed with bow instead of bough,
I would have guessed you came as Amazons,
Ravenous, manless, to devour our flesh.
(*Suppliants* 300–13)

Persians

First produced in 472 BC, *Persians* is important in literary history as the earliest surviving play in Western literature and the only Greek tragedy based on historical rather than mythical events.[18] The battle of Salamis is recounted only eight years after it took place. No less a man than Pericles, the most influential Athenian politician from the 460s BC through the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, paid for the costumes and the training of the chorus for *Persians*.[19]

The play is set in Sardis, the capital of the Persian Empire, and Aeschylus creates an "oriental" atmosphere by using litanies of Eastern-sounding names and by emphasizing opulence and luxury. All the male characters, including the ghost of Dareius, are effeminized—they obsess over clothing, wear "feminine" attire, and lament like Greek women.[20] Still, Aeschylus goes to great lengths to evoke the sympathy of his Athenian audience for its most hated enemy. As a general principle, the more an audience learns about a character's family, upbringing, and daily life, the more sympathetic the character will be. Since we come to understand Xerxes as a son, as well as a symbol of Persia, we feel sorry for him when he appears in rags and laments the reversal of his fortunes. The play is a tragedy rather than a travesty because Aeschylus encourages his audience to recognize the Persians in general and Xerxes in particular as humans who have made the very human mistake of overreaching, trying for too much. The playwright prompts us to sympathize with their error, even as he exults in the fact that it was Greeks, and Athenians in particular, who taught them the lesson. The ghost of Dareius states this lesson explicitly:

Remember Greece and Athens,
And let no Persian in the future scorn
The guardian god of present happiness
And, by desiring more and still more, squander
Prosperity.
(*Persians* 901–5)

It is striking that the ghost's moral applies just as well to the Athenian Empire that grew up rapidly in years after this play was produced, only to crumble at the end of the fifth century BC.

The necromancy episode introduces, in the ghost of Dareius, the first in a long line of theatrical apparitions, including those of Hamlet and of Banquo in Shakespeare. In *Persians* the ghost provides the living characters with access to divine knowledge and wisdom, a role served by prophets like Teiresias in later tragedy. Through the ghost, we learn that a curse on the ruling house of Persia is partly responsible for his son Xerxes' defeat. Dareius had assumed the curse would afflict his family "generations down the line" instead (806). Aeschylus thus imports a stock Greek tragic motif (the family curse) into the Persian setting.

Seven against Thebes

This tragedy was originally third in a trilogy that focused on the ruling house of Thebes: the first play concerned Laius; the second, his son Oedipus; and the third, *Seven against Thebes,* the conflict between Oedipus's sons Polyneices and Eteocles. Though several choral odes in the play hint at and even narrate parts of the backstory, it will be useful to summarize it here.

When Laius, the rightful heir to the throne of Thebes, is driven into exile, he goes to the court of King Pelops at Mycenae, where Laius takes advantage of the king's son Chrysippus. Driven out of Mycenae for this offense against his host, he goes to Delphi to ask the oracle of Apollo how he can be absolved of his crime. He is told, "To save Thebes, die without posterity." He later returns to Thebes, assumes the throne, and takes Jocasta as his queen. In a lapse of memory (or, in some accounts, while drunk), Laius does eventually impregnate his wife Jocasta with Oedipus. In an attempt to do away with the mistake, he has the child exposed (left to die) on Mount Cithaeron with pins driven through his ankles to keep him from wandering. Like all other exposed infants in Greek myth, the child survives. A shepherd takes the infant Oedipus to Polybus and Merope, the king and queen of Corinth, who raise him as their own.

Oedipus grows up ignorant of this adoption but goes to consult the oracle at Delphi when his legitimacy is called into question. There he is famously told that he will kill his father and marry his mother. He resolves to avoid Polybus and Merope, whom he still believes to be his parents. On departing from Delphi, he quarrels with Laius, who is coming to consult the oracle. Ignorant that Laius is his father, Oedipus slays him and all but one member of his retinue.

In his wanderings, Oedipus travels to Thebes, where the Sphinx, a part-

woman, part-lion, part-bird creature, is terrorizing the city. When he answers her riddle, she hurls herself to her death from the acropolis of Thebes. The hero of the hour, Oedipus wins Jocasta (his mother) as his wife and the kingship along with her. He begets four children—two sons, Polyneices and Eteocles, and two daughters, Antigone and Ismene. Oedipus's realization that he has killed his father and married his mother is dramatized in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

When his sons come of age, they mistreat their father, and he curses them, saying that a "Chalybian stranger will mete out their patrimony."[21] The stranger, as it is revealed, is iron, which was mined and worked in Chalybe (on the Black Sea). After Oedipus dies, his sons agree to split the kingship and rule for alternate one-year terms. Inevitably, Eteocles, the first brother to rule, refuses to cede the throne. Polyneices then wanders Greece and eventually marries the daughter of King Adrastus of Argos. To support his new son-in-law, Adrastus gathers an army under seven local heroes (including Polyneices), and the band goes to Thebes to set Polyneices on the throne. The tragedy begins several weeks into the siege, in the time just before the seven leaders march their troops against the seven gates of Thebes for the most intense attack thus far.

The play is famous for the seven-paired-shields scene (332–728), which consists of seven almost perfectly symmetrical exchanges between a Theban scout, Eteocles, and the chorus. The play is also famous for textual problems: the last fifth of it contains lengthy interpolations from the fourth century BC, including the lines in which the chorus introduces Antigone and Ismene (864–75), the entire episode in which Antigone confronts the herald (990–1050), and the *exodos* (1051–72).[22] The exchange assigned to Antigone and Ismene (954–89), here and in the manuscripts, originally belonged to the chorus.[23] I thought it best to translate the text as it stands rather than risk further departures from the original in an attempt at reconstruction.

Suppliants

Suppliants was most likely the first play in a trilogy with a continuous narrative. At the beginning of the play, the daughters of Danaus ("the Danaids") arrive with their father at their ancestral homeland of Argos. They find sanctuary at a local altar and entreat the local king Pelasgos to protect them from the sons of Aegyptus (their cousins) who are trying to force them into marriage. After Pelasgos persuades the assembly of Argos to accept the Danaids as suppliants, a herald for the sons of Aegyptus arrives and tries to take the girls away. Pelasgos drives him off, and the Danaids exit toward their own quarters in Argos at the end of the play. In

Aegyptoi, the second play of the trilogy, the sons of Aegyptus and their soldiers defeat the Argives in battle, and King Pelasgos is killed in the fray. The Danaids are then compelled to marry their cousins. *Danaids,* the third and final play, begins the morning after the wedding night, during which all of the sisters except for Hypermestra have killed their husbands at their father Danaus's behest. A trial is then held in which Aphrodite speaks in support of Hypermestra.[24]

Contemporary readers tend to side with the Danaids; indeed, the young women should be free to reject marriage with their cousins and with all men, if they so choose. Passages in *Suppliants* and fragments from the other plays in the trilogy suggest, however, that an ancient audience might have regarded their abstinence from marriage as an offense against the natural order of things. The handmaids make these concerns explicit toward the end of the play (1090–1109), and Aphrodite herself celebrates the *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage) in a fragment from what is most likely the final play in the trilogy:

> The sacred Sky desires to wound the Earth
> And takes hold of her to be joined in wedlock,
> And rain falls out of the impassioned Sky
> impregnating the Earth, who then brings forth
> Demeter's gifts for humankind and fodder
> for flocks and herds, and forests take their verdure
> from this moist consummation.
> (Athenaeus *Deipnosophists* 8.73.600b)

The Style of Aeschylus

Aeschylus's style is heavy and literary, characterized by an almost relentless loftiness. Much of the vocabulary comes from the *Kuntsprache* of epic rather than contemporary idiom.[25] The compound adjectives we associate with Homer are common in Aeschylus, who uses them more than Sophocles and Euripides.[26] We find examples ranging from the stock-epic "earth-holder Poseidon" to the more exotic "gadfly-goaded" itch (*Seven against Thebes* 284; *Suppliants* 621). Aeschylus's characters often organize their speeches by ring composition, a technique by which a speaker returns at the end of a speech, or at the end of a section of a speech, to his or her opening words or thoughts. Take the opening of *Seven against Thebes* as an example: Eteocles addresses "citizens of the town that Cadmus founded" in line 1 and then prays that Zeus protect "old King Cadmus's town" ten lines later. The recapitulation of "Cadmus's town" (or Cadmeia, the original name of Thebes) ties off the first eleven lines as a unit.

Aeschylus makes frequent use of stichomythia, or line-for-line dialogue between two characters, most often in argument or interrogation.[27] *Epirrhemata,* or exchanges between speaking and singing characters, are also common. The chorus in particular, when it is agitated, tends to sing its responses to a speaking actor. Thus, the Persian elders sing to the messenger when they first find out about the defeat of their army (*Persians* 261–301) as do the Danaids when they fear that Pelasgos will refuse to assist them (*Suppliants* 373–439). A counterexample occurs in *Seven against Thebes* when the chorus sings in an attempt to calm down Eteocles and dissuade him from fighting his brother (689–715).

Aeschylus's choral odes are distinct from those of his successors in that they tend to be longer and more closely bound up with the plot.[28] In *Persians* and *Suppliants,* the *parodoi,* or "entry songs," each more than one hundred lines long, serve purposes later reserved for prologues, in that they establish the setting and provide backstory. The content of Aeschylus's odes also can provide the occasion for a scene: the chorus of Persian elders, for example, sings the necromantic ode that summons the ghost of Dareius, and Eteocles, after overhearing the latter part of the *parodos* in *Seven against Thebes,* vents his anger over it in the subsequent episode. The imagery of the odes is often phantasmagoric. Take, for example, the way in which the Danaids describe the *hybris* they perceive in the sons of Aegyptus:

> Let [Zeus] look down on human pride—
> The old vine sprouts afresh,
> Itching to take me as a bride.
> Its reason works beyond dissuasion,
> Like a switch for lashing cattle,
> Implacable and rash;
> A vain obsession turning fatal.
> (*Suppliants* 117–23)

Human pride here is initially, through metaphor, a vine. This vine, however, is personified with volition (118–20, 122–23) and, by simile, becomes a cattle-switch (121). Thus, through a phantasmagoric transformation, the abstraction "pride" is tied to the imagery of the play—the Danaids, as descendants of Io, who was for a time a cow, now may suffer, like cows, a lashing from the sons of Aegyptus. Aeschylus's choruses also often call attention to the fact that they are singing and explain what sort of ode the audience should expect. The most common types are the hymn and the dirge, but we do find "black magic" incantations as well, such as the necromantic hymn in *Persians* (688–738) and the Furies' "binding song" in *Eumenides.*

In terms of dramatic style, Aeschylus tends toward grandiose, or what we might call "operatic," spectacle.[29] We find, for example, frequent use of chariots. The queen in *Persians,* Pelasgos in *Suppliants,* and Agamemnon in his eponymous play all make entrances in horse-drawn chariots flanked by numerous attendants and retainers.[30] Aeschylus also not infrequently sends the chorus members running individually and in small groups throughout the playing space. Rather than entering in an orderly fashion as a unified body, the chorus of Theban women in *Seven against Thebes* enters frantically in smaller groups and expresses confusion and horror at the sounds of battle. The Furies that composed the chorus of *Eumenides* are infamous in this regard. According to one (admittedly dubious) account, their sudden entrance and the appearance of their masks and costumes were so frightening at the original production that a pregnant woman in the audience miscarried and died.[31]

The Resources of the Athenian Stage

The plays in this volume were first performed at the Theater of Dionysus in Athens. No part of the theater was built in stone at the time of their production.[32] One should rather imagine a setting similar to a county fair. Temporary wooden seats called *ikria* were set into the hillside,[33] and the playing space consisted simply of a level open area called the *orchestra.*[34] Actors entered the playing space through two side-aisles called *eisodoi*. A stage altar set in the middle of the orchestra served a variety of functions—it was the tomb of Dareius in *Persians,* the acropolis of Thebes in *Seven against Thebes,* and the shared altar (*koinobōmia*) that provides sanctuary to the Danaids in *Suppliants*.[35] There was no underground passageway, or "Charonian steps," into the orchestra, so the ghost of Dareius did not access his tomb from below.[36] Later plays made use of a cantilevered crane, or *mechanē,* to lift flying characters (usually gods) into the playing space. There is no evidence, however, that this contraption was used in any of the plays of Aeschylus. As there was no *skēnē,* the *enkuklēma,* a wheeled device that revealed what was taking place behind the *skēnē,* also was not used for these plays, though it may have been in the *Oresteia*. Thus, the theater at the time when these plays were produced was simple—boards on a hillside facing an open level space accessible by two side entrances. The only stage-property was the "altar" in the center of the orchestra. The altar could represent anything from a tomb to a hilltop.

Aeschylus, however, filled this modest playing space with dynamic movement: Xerxes and the Persian elders lash themselves into a frenzy of lamentation, the Theban women enter in frantic and scattered groups, and the Egyptian herald tries to drag the Danaids from an altar in what is one of

the clearest examples of onstage violence in tragedy. Remarkable also is the symbolic value Aeschylus places in costumes: the contrast between the Persians' initially sumptuous gowns and their subsequent rags is central to the play, the Theban champions display what are almost magical emblems on their shields, and the Danaids' exotic Egyptian attire stands in stark contrast to that of the Greeks. Though the performance space was simple, the performances themselves were visually striking.

The Translation

In order to make clear the distinction between dialogue and choral meters, I have translated the spoken passages into blank verse and the sung passages into rhymed or off-rhymed verse. The most common dialogue meter is called *iambic trimeter* in Greek prosody, though we would call it iambic hexameter (or the Alexandrine). This meter was regarded as the closest to everyday speech,[37] so the iambic pentameter of Shakespeare was the natural choice to bring it across into English. In *Persians,* the queen, the ghost of Dareius, and the chorus occasionally converse in trochaic tetrameter (what we would call trochaic octometer). Poe's "The Raven" and Tennyson's "Locksley Hall" are well-known exemplars in English. In such passages I chose to use the same metrical pattern as the original because it would be familiar to an English speaker's ear.

If Aeschylus were to hand in his choral odes as assignments for a first-year composition course, the instructor would mark them down for run-on sentences, sentence fragments, ambiguity, and mixed metaphors—all signs that writing is "bad" by contemporary standards. His odes come off as visionary, however, instead of obscurantist because the relentlessly lofty diction, the at times elusive grammar, and the complex imagery, for all their difficulty, are convincing in their visionary scope. My experience wringing meaning out of Aeschylus's plays matches the experience of other readers: the tone is so authoritative that, rather than simply concluding that Aeschylus is full of it, we assume that such profundity, like God Himself, is difficult to grasp. The deeper we delve into Aeschylus, the greater our reward.

Still, if at times the exact meaning of the odes is elusive, their structure is not. Translators have tended to render them as masses of wild and whirling words, arbitrary in their form and rhythm, though in the original they are rigidly structured. The formal elements that make up a choral ode are stanzas called *strophe, antistrophe,* and *epode* (or, in Roethke's phrase, "the Turn, and Counter-turn and Stand" ["I Knew a Woman," 9]). The metrical pattern for each antistrophe is identical or nearly identical to its strophe. I resolved to preserve this metrical responsion by using the same scheme of meter and rhyme for each set and by distinguishing each set with a dif-

ferent scheme. Rhyme, it seemed, was necessary to indicate that the choral odes are not conversational speech but song. Furthermore, since I render the dialogue meters in blank verse, the transition to rhyme reinforces the distinction between dialogue and song.

There are few models for rhyming translations of choral odes early in the twentieth century and very few after the 1940s (e.g., Anthony Hecht's 1973 occasionally rhyming translation of Aeschylus's *Seven against Thebes*). In Gilbert Murray's early-to-mid-twentieth-century translations of tragic odes, the effect of loftiness is achieved through archaic diction and poetic inversions. Though these stylistic devices do correlate with elements of Aeschylus's style, contemporary readers simply have no patience for such things. I chose instead the best of Yeats's translations of the Sophoclean odes as my models because Yeats uses contemporary diction and comparatively few inversions. I resolved, however, to remain more faithful to the originals than Yeats and to be at least as faithful as the most recent nonrhyming translators of the odes.

My translations are based on Martin L. West's 1990 edition of the tragedies of Aeschylus. In those few places where I prefer a variant reading, I provide a note in the commentary following the plays. The stage directions in italics are based on inferences from the text and the resources of the Theater of Dionysus in Athens at the time of production.

Notes

1. Sutton 1987, 12.

2. Pausanias *Description of Greece* 1.21.3.

3. Stylistic analysis has revealed a more self-conscious style than we find in the other six tragedies, and sophistic diction and later grammatical usages suggest *Prometheus Bound* was written in the 440s BC at the earliest, after Aeschylus's death. See Griffith 1977, 1983. Aeschylus's son Euphorion may have revised a draft of the play and produced it as a work of his father's.

4. *Histories* 6.114.

5. For Psytalleia, see *Persians* 478–80 and note.

6. *Histories* 7.89.1 and 7.184.1 rely on *Persians* 360–65 for the number of ships in the Persian armada.

7. First *Vita* 4; for the battle of Plataia, see *Persians* 875–99 and note.

8. Second *Vita* 7–8.

9. Aristotle *Nichomachean Ethics* 3.2.1111a8; Aelian *Varia Historia* 5, 19. According to the first *Vita*, some alleged that Aeschylus traveled to the court of Hieron because he had been defeated at the Festival of Dionysus by the young Sophocles, others claimed that Aeschylus traveled because Simonides' epitaph for the war-dead at Marathon was chosen over his (27–29).

10. First *Vita* 68–69.

11. First *Vita* 36–39. We also learn here that it had been prophesied that "a bolt from heaven would strike him dead"; this prophecy is not attested elsewhere.

12. First *Vita* 42–45.

13. First *Vita* 48–49, Philostratus *Life of Apollonius* 6.11 and Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.66; cf. Aristophanes *Acharnians* 10–11 and Aristophanes *Frogs* 868, $\Sigma^{\text{REI}\Gamma}$. The allusion to an Aeschylean revival in Aristophanes *Acharnians* 10–11 (425 BC) and allusions to the pseudo-Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound* in Aristophanes *Knights* 758–59 (*Prometheus Bound* 59, 308), 836 (*Prometheus Bound* 613) (424 BC), and Aristophanes *Peace* 319–20 (*Prometheus Bound* 994) (421 BC) suggest that producers took advantage of the decree guaranteeing a chorus for revivals of Aeschylus's plays at least as early as 425 BC and that the decree was most likely passed in the late third quarter of the fifth century. See also Olson 2002, 68–69nn10–11.

14. In the final episode of *Seven against Thebes,* there are three speaking actors—Antigone, Ismene, and a Theban herald, but this scene was interpolated in the fourth century BC (Csapo and Slater 1995, 221).

15. I have argued that the six Theban champions are present on stage (Poochigian 2007, 1–12).

16. Csapo and Slater 1995, 222.

17. Pylades speaks his only line at *Libation Bearers* 900–902.

18. Two other "historical" tragedies, Phrynichus's *Sack of Miletus* and *Phoenician Women,* have not come down to us. Produced ca. 476 BC, *Phoenician Women* presented the Persian defeat at Salamis from an Eastern perspective and served as the model for *Persians*. The scanty evidence we have suggests that Phrynichus did not encourage his Athenian audience to sympathize with its enemies.

19. Didaskalia A 1.1.

20. Hall 1989, 81–86.

21. Inferred from 734–40. See Hutchinson 1985, xxix.

22. Hutchinson 1985, xlii–xlvi, 190–91nn861–74, 209–11nn1005–78.

23. Hutchinson 1985, 202–3nn961–1004.

24. Though generally accepted, this reconstruction of the trilogy is not certain. For an in-depth discussion, see Sommerstein 2008, 277–87.

25. Aeschylus allegedly referred to his plays as "slices from Homer's great banquet" (Athenaeus *Deipnosophists* 8.347d).

26. Griffith 1977, 150.

27. For examples of stichomythia, see *Persians* 242–57, 779–802; *Seven against Thebes* 226–44, 719–26, 808–14, 1038–49; *Suppliants* 219–36, 317–47, 358–72, 499–511, 561–70, 963–76.

28. Aeschylus's tragedies were 40–50% choral; his successors' plays involved a far lower percentage of choral passages (Csapo and Slater 1995, 349). The character Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs* complains that Aeschylus would "string four choral odes together" (914–15).

29. First *Vita* 25–26; Aristophanes *Frogs* 144, 834.

30. Aristophanes *Frogs* 962; Taplin 1977, 75–79, 200–202, 304–6.

31. First *Vita* 32.

32. Dinsmoor 1951 dates the stone foundations to the Peace of Nicias (421 BC), Kalligas 1963 dates the foundations to the mid-fourth century at the earliest, and Travlos 1971 dates them to around the end of the fourth century.

33. Cratinus fragment 360 Kassel-Austin (*Poetae Comici Graeci* 1983) and Aristophanes *Women of the Thesmaphoria* 395. Hourmouziades suggests ways in which the wooden *skēnē* could have been used (1965, 1–6).

34. The orchestra was most likely an undefined space, neither circular nor rectilinear (Fiechter 1935, 28; Gebhard 1974, 433).

35. Rehm 1988, 263–307.

36. Dörpfeld and Reisch 1896, 57–59, 248–50; Fiechter 1935, 52; Pickard-Cambridge 1946, 50–51, 146.

37. Aristotle *Poetics* 4.14 1449a 24–26.

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Persians,
Seven against Thebes,
and Suppliants

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Persians

Characters:

Chorus of Persian elders
Queen of Persia, widow of Dareius and mother of Xerxes
Persian messenger
Ghost of King Dareius, father of Xerxes
King Xerxes

Setting: *A crossroads near Susa, capital of the Persian Empire. Near a council house. On the left, a road to the Imperial Palace. On the right, a road to Susa from the west. A group of twelve Persian elders enters, left.*

Chorus:

When all the Persian troops had gone
To conquer Greece, we old men known
As "The Trustees" were left to guard
A rich, gold-glittering estate.
Xerxes himself, high king, warlord,
(And eldest scion of the late
Dareius) ordered us to head
The empire while he is abroad,
Trusting in our long years of service.

For some time now I have been nervous
For him and his gold-glittering host—
When will they ever come back home?
The fortune-teller in my breast
Has cried out with the voice of doom
Because the whole strength of the land
Has set out eagerly yapping round
An inexperienced man, and still
No page or courier has come
With dispatch to the capital.

From Susa, Ecbatana, and the ancient
Kissian castle-keep,
They left on horseback, foot, and ship,
Each marshalling his own contingent:

Artaphernes, Megabates,
Astaspes, and Amistris—all
Persians who love their king. Astraddle
Horses and spurring countless bodies,
Those bowmen were a frightening sight,
So fierce in battle, so much pride.
Masistris reckoned in their number,
Artembares warhorse tamer,
Imaios the high-minded archer,
Pharnadakes, and Sosthanes
Urging his team of stallions on.

Glorious for the floods they nurture,
The streams of Nile sent Sousikanes,
Egypt's own Pegastagon,
And large Arsames who is famous
For chanting at the Memphian altar.
Among them, too, was Ariomardos,
Overseer of Thebes the Elder,
And those old hands at mud and fen,
Delta-goers, skillful rowers,
Innumerable rivermen.

Next went the wealthy Lydians,
Who govern all the coastal clans.
With funding from gold-glittering Sardis,
Two of the high king's officers,
Mitrogathes and brave Arkteus,
Sent tribesmen forth as charioteers
To drive their countless battle cars.
Half were twin-, half triple-poled,
But all were dreadful to behold.

Our lance-shattering anvils, then,
Tharybis, Mardon, rushing down
The slopes of holy Tmolus, led
A light-armed Mysian brigade
To clap Greece in a slavish yoke;
And gold-glittering Babylon
Dispatched, en masse, its alloyed corps:
Men mounted on a rowing-deck
Or shooting valiance from afar.

Every saber-bearing race
In Asia has assumed its place
In Xerxes' terrifying train—
Thus was the flower of manhood,
The best of Persia, sent abroad.

The continent that nursed them sighs
And burns to have them home again.
Their wives and children mark the days,
Shuddering as the time drags on.

Strophe A

The high king's city-engulfing host
Has long since breached the coast
That dares oppose his own. Sea's neck
Harnessed beneath a yoke,
Our soldiers crossed the stretch of water
Named for Athamas's daughter
On a road made of dowels and knots,
A boulevard of boats.

Antistrophe A

Prolific Asia's willful master
Drove pious flocks to pasture
On separate fields: some graze the brine;
Others, the battle plain;
But everywhere staunch deputies
Have set his mind at ease.
Only a golden race could breed
A man so like a god.

Strophe B

How like a surfeit serpent's slits
His eyes shine black, emit no light.
From his Assyrian chariot
This king of countless troops and fleets
Leads a far-shooting god of war
Against men famous for the spear.

Antistrophe B

Nothing, not even an army tried

In battle, can withstand our flood
Of soldiers, no stone mole exclude
The rising and impossible tide.
Our empire has an iron will;
Its battery is unstoppable.

Strophe C

Destiny, by the will of heaven,
has ruled for years and always given
Our race success when it engages
In rampart-devastating sieges,
The counterplay of charging horses
Or leveling a hilltop fortress. 105 (107)

Antistrophe C

So, when the crosswind's boisterous breath
Battered our passage to white froth,
We pierced the wild groves of the sea
With our ingenuity,
Daring to trust a file of troops
To bold devices, plaited ropes.

Epode

And yet . . . what mortal can outwit
Deities skilled at sleight of hand?
What nimble tumbler with a bound
Clear the encircling net?
Clever Calamity spreads grins
Around the entrance to the trap;
And man, once caught, for all he strains
And wriggles, never can escape.

Strophe D

So my heart wears a sable cloak 120 (114)
And shudders at its fears—
The army never coming back
And, soon as the whole city hears
The mighty seat of Susa is
Unmanned and vacuous,

Antistrophe D

The walls of Kissia responding
As the women keen,
Responding to the rhythmic pounding
Of female fists on their own skin.
I fear their gorgeous muslin dresses
Will be ripped to pieces.

Strophe E

Now that all our warlike men
On horseback and on foot left home
As bees swarm from the honeycomb
And marched with the high suzerain (129)
Over the ridge that joins two lands
(A yoke across the continents),

Antistrophe E

All our marriage beds are brimming
With tears of longing. Wives who saw
Armed eager husbands off to war
Are still awaiting their homecoming:
They sit here wistful and alone,
Tenderly grieving men long gone.

Come, old Persians, since the need
Has come upon us, let us gather
Under this ancient roof and brood
Wisely and thoroughly upon
These matters: Is Dareius's son
True to the great name of his father
And successful in this war? (145)
Has the back-bent longbow won
Or the hefty tapered spear?

The Queen of Persia enters on a chariot and with retinue, left.

But look there! Xerxes' royal mother
Is sweeping toward us, luminary
As gods' eyes carved in statuary.
I bow down humbly to the floor.
Come, let us duly welcome her:

The Persian elders prostrate themselves before the Queen as if she were a god.

Greetings to the most exalted of the deep-sashed Persian matrons!
All hail Xerxes' reverend mother and the widow of Dareius!
Queen, you are the former consort of a Persian god, as such,
You in turn are mother to a god—unless, perhaps, the faithful
Guardian spirit of the army has at long last turned against it.

Queen:

Such fears are the reason I have set forth from the gilded palace,
Left the chamber King Dareius and myself once held in common—
I have come because a thought gnaws on my heart. Since
apprehension (161)
Never lets me rest, old friends, I shall confess my fear: by kicking
Dust clouds up around the world, our own colossal wealth may ruin
All the benefits Dareius heaped up with a god's assistance.

Hence the double cares fretting my breast: that heaps of wealth are
nothing
Without soldiers, and that splendor never shines on
beggared races,
Even if their strength is great. Although our wealth is not in danger,
I am worried about Xerxes—he is daylight in my eyes;
Yes, his regal presence shines like daylight in the palace.
Therefore,
Seasoned loyalists, old Persians, since this matter stands just so,
Share your minds with me. I rest my hopes entirely on
your guidance.

Chorus leader:

Queen of Persia, rest assured that you need never twice request
Any action or advice our modest powers can offer you.
You have called on counselors who only have the best intentions.

Queen:

I have been nightly visited by dreams
Since that first evening when my son the king, (177)
With all his panoply arrayed around him,
Departed for the land of the Ionians.
None of my visions, though, were half so vivid
As what I saw last night. Let me describe it:

Two ladies, on parade before my eyes,
Were modeling distinctive kinds of dress.
Though they were sisters of a common stock,
And though, perfectly lovely both, they stood
Taller than any women of this world,
One of them head to foot was lapped in Persian
Finery, while the other simply wore
A Doric skirt. The latter had obtained
Greece as her lot, their common fatherland;
The former settled in our Eastern empire.

Something had come between them, or so it seemed, 195 (188)
And when my son found out about the quarrel,
He bound them both and broke them to the harness
Beneath his chariot. When the yoke was laid
Across their necks, the girl in Persian dress
Stood towerlike in her caparisons
And like a good mare answered to the bit.
The other mettlesomely flicked the reins;
Hands tearing harness from the tracing-pole,
She bucked and galloped with free rein until
The pole was broken and my son went reeling.
And there beside the wreckage stood his father,
Dareius, pitying him. Beneath that gaze
Xerxes could only tear the gorgeous gown
Wrapped round and round his body into ribbons.

Straight out of bed I went to dip my hands 210 (201)
In lustral water. Later, at the altar,
Poised in the act of offering honey, oil,
And barley to the talismanic gods
To whom such rites are due, I saw an eagle
Aflutter and diving toward the sun god's shrine.
I stopped and stood there, gaping at the omen.
A falcon intercepted it, midflight;
Wings beating, talons tearing at its crest,
The reeling eagle only could sink lower
And lower—an auspice striking to my eyes
As to your ears.
Now mark my words: my son,
When he succeeds, will be a paragon
Among us; but if somehow he should fail,

He will in no way be accountable.
Let me be clear: if Xerxes makes it home 225 (214)
Alive, he will command us as before.

Chorus leader:

Since you are a mother, we would neither frighten you unduly
Nor build up your hopes too high:
if you have seen a dire omen,
Supplicate the gods, pray that they ward the evil off by turning
Menace into benefit for you and yours, your friends, the city. 230
Next, go pour libations to the Earth and Dear Departed, wisely
Asking that your spouse Dareius (whom you witnessed in the vision)
Send, from darkness to the light, good fortunes for your son and you;
Further stipulate that the opposing fortunes be detained there,
Pent beneath the earth, to fade into the gloom—
such is the counsel 235
I present to you with high hopes and heartfelt prognostication.
We predict that all will turn out well for you in every way.

Queen:

As the first to read my dream, sir, you have shown my son and palace
That you certainly mean well. May only good things come to pass.
Back at my estate, I shall perform these rites as you instructed, 240 (229)
Paying honor both to gods and family beneath the earth.

There are several further questions I would like to ask you: first,
Where in the wide world is Athens said to have been situated?

Chorus leader:

Far off westward where the sun god dims his brilliance and goes down.

Queen:

This, then, is the outpost Xerxes so long wanted to expunge? 245

Chorus leader:

When that town is taken, all of Greece will answer to your son.

Queen:

Do they have on hand sufficient bodies to compose an army?

Chorus leader:

Yes, an army strong enough to have wreaked havoc on the Medes.

Queen:

What besides can they lay claim to? Well-stocked coffers in a palace?

Chorus leader:

Rather fountainheads of silver, treasure buried in the earth.

Queen:

Do the bow and arrow fit as comfortably in their hands?

Chorus leader:

Hardly, rather spears for hand-to-hand and shields, their only armor.

Queen:

Does that herd have any head, some suzerain to urge them on?

Chorus leader:

Neither slaves nor subjects, they are said to serve no king at all.

Queen:

How can they expect to join in common cause against
invasion? (243)

Chorus leader:

Well enough to have once crushed the noble legions of Dareius.

Queen:

Hard words, truly, for the parents who have sent their sons to war.

The Messenger appears at the far end of the road on the right, disheveled and panting from a long run.

Chorus leader:

You will swiftly hear a full, candid account, it seems—this fellow
Dashing towards us shows the clear signs of a Persian in his gait.
Doubtless, he is bringing recent tidings—good, perhaps,
or grim.

Messenger:

You Asian strongholds and you Persian earth,
Port of colossal wealth, a single blow,
And all your vast prosperity is shattered!
The flower of Persia wilted and has died.

Although the first man to relate hard news
Has a hard task before him, duty bids me
Ravel the whole disaster out. In sum:
The entire army of the East is lost.

Chorus:
Strophe A

Weighty, weighty disaster breaks
Suddenly, cruelly over us!
Weep, weep, Persians, since he speaks
Of heaviness.

Messenger:

All of those troops destroyed! And I, past hope,
Survived to see the day of my return.

Chorus:
Antistrophe A

The course of our longevity
Has dragged out age for too long now—
To hear of so much misery
Out of the blue!

Messenger:

I was there, Persians, saw it all firsthand
And can report the losses we have suffered.

Chorus:
Strophe B

Woe—we deployed an arsenal
To conquer Greece, the land of Zeus,
And all our sundry ways to kill
Were of no use, no use.

Messenger:

The shores of Salamis and coastal stretches
Abound in lonely corpses, heaps of corpses. 285 (273)

Chorus:
Antistrophe B

Woe—you have told us our loved ones
Are now sea-beaten, dead.
Some of them, weighted by their gowns,
Are swaying in the tide.

Messenger:

Our archery proved pointless; our armada 290
Went down penetrated by their prows.

Chorus:
Strophe C

Raise a despairing, comfortless
Wail for the Persians, a fierce race,
Who now are utterly undone.
Woe, woe for our lost campaign. 295

Messenger:

"Salamis" is a hiss, a hated name,
And ah! I choke up when pronouncing "Athens."

Chorus:
Antistrophe C

Athens is ruthless to invasion.
Never forget how many Persian
Women built their nests in vain— 300 (288)
Athens has killed our sons, our men.

Queen:

I have stood sad and silent for some time
Because your news has stuck me dumb, because
The whole thing has so overwhelmed me that
I cannot properly fit words together 305
And ask you how it happened.
All the same,

It is the task of mankind to endure
Whatever woes divinities decide on.
Now pull yourself together, sir; unravel
The whole disaster from beginning to end,
Even if you must groan while telling it.

Who has survived? And whom are we to mourn?
Which leaders set to watch with rod in hand
Forever have deserted our front lines?

Messenger:

Xerxes survived and yet looks on the light. 315 (299)

Queen:

Those words are radiance shining through the palace,
Daylight ending the great gloom of night!

Messenger:

But Artembares, who as general had
Ten thousand horsemen at his beck and call,
Is being ground down to nothing, as we speak,
On the hard headland of Sileniai.
The chiliarch Dadakes bounded nimbly
Over the gunnel when a spear struck home,
And that blue-blooded Bactrian, Tenagon,
Resides now on the wave-washed Isle of Aias.

Lilaios and Arsames, with Argestes,
Rammed in defeat a rocky promontory
Where pigeons come to roost. Arkteus, once neighbor
To the headwaters of Egyptian Nile,
Went tumbling headlong overboard, beside
Shield-wielding Pharnouchos and Adeues.

Matallus, born in Chrysa, once a captain
Who drove ten thousand troops to battle, once
The leader of the thirty thousand riders
Known as the Sable Horse, drowned in the strait,
His full, red, bristling beard turning to purple
In brackish water. Arabus the Mage
And Bactrian Artabes both fell there,
Aliens, now, on foreign soil. Amistris,

And Amphistreus, hurler of painful lances,
Good Ariomardos (a home grief for Sardis!),
Mysian Seisames, even Tharybis,
Admiral of five times fifty ships,
A dashing chap, and a Lerneian—all
Had bad luck there and died in shameful ways. 345 (324)

At least the governor of the Cilicians,
Sunnesis the Courageous, wreaking havoc
Hand-to-hand among them, passed in glory.

That's the extent of what I can relate
About the leaders, since, out of so many
Disasters, I can only list a few.

Queen:

Hideous news! The scene you are describing
Reaches the height of all catastrophe—
Humiliation for the Persians, reason
For piercing cries. But turn back to your story
And tell me this: how multitudinous was
The Greek armada, that they hoped to match
Our navy in a battle, prow for prow?

Messenger:

If one can trust in numbers, rest assured
We should have crushed them. All in all, their fleet was 360 (338)
A mere three-hundred vessels, ten of which
Were worthy of respect. Xerxes' armada
Was fully a thousand galleys strong, I swear,
And of that sum at least two hundred seven
Matchless in swiftness—so much for the odds.

Really, do you believe arithmetic
Had any bearing? No, it was some god
That shattered our whole fleet, dropping a sinking
Destiny onto our side of the balance.
The gods prop up the citadel of Pallas.

Queen:

So Athens still has not been razed to rubble?

Messenger:

With men to man them, city walls are strong.

Queen:

But tell me: who began the naval engagement?
Was it the Greeks or did my son strike first,
Puffed up with false pride in his multitude?

Messenger:

Some vengeful spirit or some spiteful power
Must have begun our troubles, queen. A Greek
Came to our barracks, an Athenian,
And told your son, King Xerxes, that the foe
Would not engage us, no, they meant to man
The benches in the darkest hours of night
And slip away in secretive retreat,
Some this way and some that, to save their lives.
Your son accepted the whole story, never
Conceiving that a Greek could be a liar,
Nor that a god could bear a grudge against him.

In a harangue he told his admirals
That when the sun released the land from light
And darkness claimed the precinct of the sky
Three squadrons from the navy should be sent
To guard the straits which lead to open ocean,
And that a fourth division should blockade
The Isle of Aias. Further, if the Greeks
Should somehow find means in their single ships
Secretly to outstrip their final hour,
Every admiral would die, headless.
So spoke the great king with a hopeful mind—
Too hopeful, for he did not understand
The gods' intent.
When we had messed that evening,
All hands yarely and with one spirit fit
The oars they knew so well into the straps.
The last rays of the twilight died, and night
Came rushing in, and every man walked up
The gangplank like a sultan of his oar
And captain of the rigging. Exhortations

Swept through our massive hulls from bench to bench
As each ship coasted to its post. All night
The captains kept the navy under sail.

Though night was nearly done, still the Greek army
Had not attempted any sly escape;
However, when dawn rose on her white horses
And filled the world with radiance, a cry,
Ominous and melodious, resounded
Over the water from the Greek encampment.
Straightway, the headlands of the island answered
Hoarsely their battle song, and terror fell
On us barbarians. We had been mistaken.

Not in retreat were the Greek soldiers singing
The sacred battle hymn, no, they were rushing
To combat, hopeful, even confident. 420 (394)
Their hearts took fire from a bellowing trumpet,
And smartly as the helmsmen called the strokes,
The plashing and the rhythmic oar dug up
Swaths of the sea. Soon we could see them coming:
There in the vanguard was the right wing, locked
In tight formation; then their navy wholly
Swept into sight. At last we could make out
The words they shouted over and over again:
"Onward, O sons of Greece, come, free the land
That bore you; liberate your wives and children;
Free tombs of ancestors and temple-homes
Of native gods. This battle is do or die!"
Out of our ranks only a Persian murmur
Rose to oppose them—then when every instant
Cried out for action!

Soon a beak of bronze 435 (408)
Hove in a ship—it was some vessel of theirs
That started all the ramming, ripped the stern
Of a Phoenician warship clean away.
Each of their captains steered his prow dead on
Into our hulls. Our massive Persian navy
Put up a fight at first, but as it was,
So many vessels in so tight a strait,
No help from anywhere, the bronze-toothed beaks

Of our own warships beat on our own boards
And shivered all the rowing-gear. All tact
And prudence, they kept pounding on our planks
In circular formations. Soon our keels
Were in the air, and the sea's surface, crammed
With naval wreckage and remains of men,
Was nowhere to be seen. The barrier reefs,
Even the shoreline, were awash with bodies.
When every ship that still survived to bear
The remnants of our army into flight
Scattered disorderly, they caught us, flayed us
Like mackerel, like some school of fish, with riven
Oars and the splinters of our wrack. Our wailing
Coursed through the sea, a wailing mixed with shrieks,
Until the black eye of the night released us.

I never could detail the whole disaster,
Not if I had ten days to tell it in,
For never in one day (and mark me well),
Never in one day only has so vast
A multitude of soldiers met its fate.

QUEEN:

Truly a huge and catastrophic ocean
Has broken on Persia and the Eastern peoples.

MESSENGER:

And that's not even half of it—so weighty
An agony succeeded this first stroke
That in the balance we sank twice as low.

QUEEN:

But what misfortune could be worse than this!
Speak of this second blow, which, as you say,
Tipped the scales further downward for our army.

MESSENGER:

Persians in their peak and prime, of courage
Noted and by pedigree distinguished—
Men who were staunchly faithful to their king—
Perished in manners most humiliating.

Queen:

Ah, my friends, these evils lay me low.
What deaths, though, do you say they suffered?

Messenger:

Off Salamis lies an island, small, a mooring
Tricky for men-of-war. Along its shore,
The dance god Pan supposedly goes traipsing. 480 (449)
Here had your son assigned his best men, first,
To pick off handily whichever Greeks
Sought safety from a shipwreck on dry land
And, second, in the odd chance that our sailors
Went overboard, to fish them from the straits— 485
So foolishly he reckoned on the future.

The very day that god had granted them
Fame in the form of victory at sea,
The Greeks (armed to a man from head to foot)
Vaulted from gunnels all around the island— 490
There was nowhere to turn. With stone in hand
And arrow on the string, they wore away
Our nobles at long range. In the end, however,
With one last rush and rallying cry, they hacked,
No, butchered piecemeal our gentility, 495 (463)
Until no one was left alive.
Seaside,
Atop a peak with a commanding view
Of the whole army, Xerxes looked downward
Into the depth of the disaster and groaned.
His vestments rent by his own hands, he shrieked 500
Immediate retreat at the foot soldiers
And fled, indecorous—a further reason
To grieve on top of all that came before.

Queen:

O deity detestable for stealing
Our Persian common sense! My son contrived 505
Harsh punishments indeed for glorious Athens!
All the Eastern lives that Marathon
Had wasted, to his mind, were not enough.
Sure of avenging our defeat, he brought on

Only so many more afflictions.
Tell me,
What ships escaped? Where did you see them last?
You know enough to tell me in detail?

MESSENGER:

The captains of the few remaining vessels
Awkwardly started homeward, and for this
The wind was not unfriendly. In Boeotia
The remnants of our army went on dying,
Some of them parched and yards from bracing springs.
Others of us, though breathless, made our way
To Phocis, Doris, and the Malian Gulf
Where Sperchios so generously begins
To irrigate the plain.
On to Achaia,
Then, and Thessalian citadels—cold comfort
For starving soldiers. There our numbers dwindled
Further from hunger and thirst, for hunger and thirst
Abounded there. We passed into the lands
Of the Magnesians and the Macedonians,
Forded the Axios and, after slogging
Through Bolbe's cattails, pitched camp at the foot
Of Mount Pangaion in Edonia.

That night god gathered an untimely storm
And froze the flowing of the sacred Strymon
Straight across, from bank to bank. Old soldiers
Who never talked much to the gods before
Hunkered like dogs on hands and knees, invoking
Heaven and Earth. After these warm entreaties,
We tried our footing on the frozen crossing,
But only those who skittered over sooner
Than the sun god had scattered all his beams
Happened to reach the other bank alive.
His keen orb with persistent glinting clove
The river down the middle and, when the rearguard
Went tumbling in on top of those before them,
Luckiest was the man who first exchanged
His breath for water.
Few, the chance survivors

Who, laboring through further pain in Thrace,
Escaped at last and reached their hearths and homes.

Here is good reason for the capital
To grieve—the loss of its beloved youth.
Every word of this is true, and still
I have omitted most of the afflictions
God has visited upon us Persians.

The Messenger exits, left.

Chorus leader:

Hard-driving god, you leapt up and have crushed
The Persian race beneath your weighty feet.

Queen:

Abominable! Our entire army
Massacred! Nocturnal vision, how (518)
Precisely you prefigured our misfortunes!
And you, my sage dream-readers, brushed it off
As nothing serious.
Still, since you happened
To counsel ritual service, I am bound
To make good on my vows and offer worship,
First, to the gods above. Then, on returning,
I shall provide Earth and the Dear Departed
With choice libations from the palace stores.
But since I know that deeds, once done, are done
Forever, I shall offer for the future,
Hoping for the better.
Careful, friends—
Henceforth be more dependable to those
Dependent on you for your good advice.
If Xerxes happens to return before me,
Comfort him if you can and to the palace (530)
Escort him before something else goes wrong.

The Queen exits in her chariot and with her retinue, left.

Chorus:
Astrophic

Absolute Zeus, you have undone
The widemouthed, many-headed

Army of Persia; you have shrouded
Susa and Ecbatana in
Sorrows as black as funeral weeds.

Fingers fitter for caresses
Have learned to tear veils into shreds;
Women are sprinkling their dresses'
Folds with tears—each has a share
In our misfortunes. Newlyweds,
Lavish in longing for the men
Who warmed their blankets and were gone,
Struggle to release all thoughts
Of bedrooms and the coverlets
Where youthful dalliance lay in love—
No, they can never mourn enough.

Therefore I, too, shall duly grieve
Over the loss, lifting my voice
To sing of many miseries:

Strophe A

Now we can be certain all
Asia raises an empty howl.
Our youth embarked with Xerxes. Ah!
Xerxes destroyed them. (Woe, woe.)
Xerxes it was
Who heeded bad advice,
Mismanaged our broad men-of-war.

Why was it no mischance could injure
Saintly Dareius, master-archer,
Susa's redoubtable emperor?

Antistrophe A

Pitch-eyed ships with linen sails
Berthed our sea- and land-details.
Our youth embarked on ships, and Ah!
Those ships destroyed them. (Woe, woe.)
The ships it was
That broke under the prows
And grappling of Ionians.

Our king had trouble while retreating
Through Thrace, we hear: he lost his footing
On icy back roads through the plains.

Strophe B

Necessity came on so fast
(No, no.)
We left the first soldiers we lost
crumpled on the Kychreian coast.
(It can't be true.)

Gnash your teeth and heave a sigh.
Raise a complaint, for all its weight,
Raise it and hurl it at the sky;
Release the cries
That stick like snarling in the throat,
A grating, grief-afflicted noise.

Antistrophe B

The ocean's hostile eddies thrash
(No, no.)
Bobbing bodies, and dumb fish
Frenziedly snap at human flesh.
(It can't be true.)

Now must a household mourn its master.
Once father and mother, man and wife
Lament a heaven-sent disaster,
Angry such news
Should fall upon them late in life—
Such catastrophic casualties.

Strophe C

All over Asia underlings
Will take no stock in Persian laws,
Nor will the title "King of Kings"
Squeeze tribute from the provinces.

None of our subjects will bow down
Before a decimated throne—
All imperial power is gone.

Antistrophe C

Tongues are no longer held in check,
Our military yoke thrown off,
The multitude are free to speak.
Whatever they are thinking of.

On all sides round the breakers lap
Aias's Isle which, drop by drop,
Appropriated Persia's hope.

The Queen enters alone and on foot, left. She is carrying three pitchers and a basket.

Queen:

Everyone that has suffered through his share
Of troubles knows that, if one wave of woes
Comes crashing in, the human heart delights
In giving way to absolute despair;
But let a guardian god once grant smooth sailing
And that same heart will just as soon assume
The lucky breeze will always swell its sail.

All things for me are filled with fear already.
Inside my eyes, visions of hostile gods
Are flickering; and in my ears a trickle
Drips in a way that soothes me not at all.
Disaster on disaster has so shocked me
That I am at wit's end.
This is the reason
Why I have left the palace once again—
Sans chariot and in a humble gown.
I stand before you with these vessels full
Of sweet appeasements that the dead delight in,
And may they reach the father of my son:
There's milk, the fine white coating for the throat
Drawn from a sacred heifer's udders; honey
That workers in the flowers have distilled
Splendid as sunlight; water that has run
In virgin springs; and that great charmer, wine,
As unadulterated as the soil
That gave it life, a venerable vintage.
I brought the olives from the olive tree

That, silver as it is, still flourishes
Even into old age. I hope its scent
Will be enticing. Lastly a bouquet 675 (618)
Of flowers, offspring risen from the earth
That raises all.
Dear friends, accompany
The pouring of these offerings with hymns
To please the dead; summon Dareius's shade
And I shall pave the way by pouring honors 680
To parched Earth and the gods of underground.

Chorus:
Astrophic

Queen mother, worshipped and obeyed
Throughout the land, while you are pouring
Gifts to their chambers in the ground,
We shall assist you by imploring 685
The deities who rule the dead
To listen and be kind:

Pure gods who dwell beneath our feet,
Earth first, Hermes next, then you,
Lord of the Dear Departed, please 690 (629)
Release a spirit to the light.
If there is something we can do,
Beyond mere prayer, to cure our woes,
He is the only mortal who
Can tell us what it is. 695

Strophe A

But will our reverend emperor,
A peer of gods, still recognize
The imprecise barbaric language
In which I frame these desperate cries?
Am I to shout out utter anguish 700
Or is he heeding me down there?

Antistrophe A

Earth and you gods who rule in her,
I beg you, please release a shade
Of great renown from his new home.
Send us a man that Susa bred, 705 (643)

A Persian god the likes of whom
Our soil has never held before.

Strophe B

Dear is the tomb, and dear the man,
And dear the character within.
Aïdoneus, Aïdoneus,
As escort to the upper air,
Please give Dareius back to us,
Release our pious emperor.

Antistrophe B

Because he spent no lives on sieges
Deities later would begrudge us
He was known throughout the realm
As reverent. He earned that title
Standing at the army's helm
Steering it prudently through battle.

Strophe C

Rise, ancient sultan, to the light. 720 (658)
Reveal your miter, tier by tier;
Come, let the sandals on your feet
Stand, all saffron, atop your bier.

We can find no fault in you—
Yet you are a father, too.

Antistrophe C

Despot of despots, please appear
And listen to our sad hard tale.
The mist of Styx is thick up here—
All of our young men perished, all.

We can find no fault in you—
Yet you are a father, too.

Epode

O thou much-lamented loss
To friend and kin, what does it mean?
Dear sultan, why must we endure
This not-to-be-forgotten twin 735 (676)

Disaster? All the triple-tiered
Ships that we built have disappeared.
Our ships are ships no more, no more.

Ghost:

Loyal trustees of my estate, old men
As staunch as when in youth we were companions,
What happened to my empire? The earth groans,
Its surface beaten down by trampling boots.
Seeing the wife who lay in bed beside me
Bent at my tomb has filled me with alarm.
With good will I received her offerings
While you, mourning at my memorial,
Summoned me up in a most desperate fashion
With necromantic gasps. Though leave is always
Hard to obtain from Hades (since the gods
Of underground are less inclined to lend
Than take away), I have come all the same,
For I am of some influence below.

Now to the point, so that I not be charged
With truancy, divulge what unexpected
And grievous wrong has fallen upon my Persians.

Chorus:
Strophe

Full of the old respect, we
Cannot look on you directly,
Cannot address
Your highness face to face.

Ghost:

I have come a long way upward in obedience to your summons,
So do not now waste the time in protest. Cast your awe aside.
Cut the tale down to essentials; tell me everything at once.

Chorus:
Antistrophe

Dazzled by you, old friend,
We cannot act on your command,
Cannot break
News that is hard to take.

Ghost:

Since the die-hard veneration in your hearts obstructs my wishes,
You, the former partner of my private chamber, noble lady,
Dry your eyes now; no more wailing. Bluntly sum the matter up.

It is only natural that setbacks mar your human fortunes
Since, for mortals, there are many tribulations, some on land,
Some at sea, but always more and more the longer life continues.

Queen:

Lucky husband, you surpassed all living men with your successes.
Every year that you were up here in the sunlight, admiration
Envied you; prosperity adorned you like a Persian god—
So now, too, I envy you for dying without ever seeing
Such great casualties. Dareius, hear the whole tale in an instant:
The success of Persia has been, more or less, completely ruined.

Ghost:

How, though? Did a plague descend? Did civil war divide the empire?

Queen:

Neither—no, our army met with devastation out near Athens. 780 (716)

Ghost:

Tell me straight: which son of mine has gone campaigning over there?

Queen:

Zealous Xerxes, after emptying the continent of men.

Ghost:

Did that wretch attempt this folly with the army or the navy?

Queen:

Both of them. The thrust was twofold and dependent on both branches.

Ghost:

How, though, did so large an army make its way across the strait?

Queen:

Xerxes fashioned an ingenious yoke to span the Hellespont.

Ghost:

And he really did this? Locked up tight the mighty Bosporus?

Queen:

Even so. Some spirit must have put the thought into his head.

Ghost:

Ah! a mighty power indeed to make him lose his common sense!

Queen:

Yes, the outcome of his plan clearly exposed how poor it was. 790

Ghost:

What befell them there that you are mourning for them in this manner?

Queen:

When it met defeat, the navy dragged the army down with it.

Ghost:

So the spear has wiped out both the branches of our military?

Queen:

Yes, and Susa, therefore, mourns her utter absence of defense.

Ghost:

Ah! to lose our faithful garrison and all support from allies! 795 (731)

Queen:

Yes, our band of Bactrians died too—not one old soldier lived.

Ghost:

Curse that boy! He has destroyed our allies' fresh stock in its prime!

Queen:

Xerxes, it is said, forlorn and with a scanty retinue—

Ghost:

Tell me how and where he perished. Any chance he has survived?

Queen:

—luckily has crossed the bridge that harnesses the continents.

Ghost:

He has safely made his way back into Asia, is it so?

Queen:

Yes, a sound report attests the fact. No others have denied it.

Ghost:

Ah, the oracle has turned into a real event too early!
Zeus has dropped the prophecy's fulfillment on my own son's head.
All these years I had assumed the gods would bring the thing to pass
Generations down the line. Still, whenever a rash person
Recklessly goes rushing forward, god need only lend a hand.
Now a font of woes, it seems, has been unearthed for all my kinsmen.

Youthful, ignorant, and hasty, my own son has done the damage.
Striving to restrain the holy flowing of the Hellespont, (745)
God's beloved Bosporus, like some old servant in the stocks,
He contrived a new bridge and, by casting manacles upon it,
Made a massive roadway for a massive army. He attempted,
Mortal though he is, to be the master of the gods. What folly!
Playing sea-god like Poseidon! How is this not symptomatic
Of a brain disease? I am afraid the ample stores of treasure
I heaped up are now mere plunder waiting for the first marauder.

Queen:

Xerxes all too readily picked up these habits from the bad advisors
Who attended him. They told him that, whereas you had amassed
Heaps of wealth for your descendents, he in cowardly fashion played
Soldier in his chamber, adding nothing to his father's stores.
Thus provoked to action day in, day out by these noxious fellows
He at last conceived his strange sea bridge and the campaign to Greece.

Ghost:

He has accomplished something great indeed
And unforgettable: no ruler ever (761)
Has managed to drain all the men from Susa
Since High King Zeus bestowed imperial honors
Upon us, setting up one lord monarchic

To rule as suzerain with rod in hand
Over the livestock-nourishing domains of Asia.

King Medos was the first to lead our army.
Second, an heir who actually managed
To reach the same distinction as his father,
Because in *his* case prudence proved the pilot
That steered his governance. The third was Cyrus,
A blessed man, who in his reign concluded
A general peace among the well-disposed:
He easily annexed the lands of Lydia
And Phrygia and pacified Ionia
By force, because no god could bear a grudge
Against so circumspect a man. His son
Succeeded him, fourth in the line to lead
The army in war.
Our fifth king, though, was Mardos,
A blot upon the empire and the throne.
Good Artaphernes crept into the palace
And with a gang of friends in a just cause
Slaughtered him; and the sixth was Maraphis;
Seventh came Artaphernes; then in turn
I hit upon the lot I long desired.
I campaigned amply with an ample army
And never with such thorough devastation
Assailed the Persian capital.
My son
Is young yet, so his plans are immature;
He has forgotten, of course, all that I told him.
Trust me when I say this, dear old friends—
None of the kings who held the throne would ever
Have been the source of so much suffering.

Chorus leader:

But, Lord Dareius, what comes next? Do you
Have any parting words? How can the Persians
Thrive in the future, after such a setback?

Ghost:

By never sending troops against the Greeks,
Not even if our Medic army is larger.
In Greece the very soil serves as their ally.

CHORUS LEADER:

How do you mean? In what way does it aid them?

GHOST:

It uses famine to reduce large armies.

CHORUS LEADER:

What if we send picked, well-provisioned soldiers?

GHOST:

Not even the contingent left in Greece
Will live to see the day of its return.

CHORUS LEADER:

What do you mean? Won't the surviving soldiers
March out of Europe through the Hellespont?

GHOST:

Of many, few—since, after having learned
Of what already happened, I must trust
In all the gods have prophesied concerning
What is to come. All oracles come true,
Not merely some. Now, since this is the case,
It's clear that Xerxes placed his confidence
On empty hopes when he resolved to leave
His picked troops as a garrison in Greece.

Bivouacked where Asopos feeds the plain
With tributary streams, they soon will be
A handsome fattening for Boiotian soil.
An end awaits them there, a crown defeat
To clear the debts of pride and sacrilege.
When they arrived in Greece, they went around
Defacing sacred images and burning
Temples down. Altars have been uprooted;
Statues of gods, snapped at the feet, have tumbled
From pedestals and lie about like rubble.

Certainly they will suffer nothing less
Than all they earned, and still more in the future.
Far from dry, the wellspring of their woes

Gushes as thickly as their blood will flow
When Doric spears, by slaughtering them, transform
Plataia's topsoil into swampy ground.
The bodies heaped in mute commemoration
Will clearly show even our great-grandchildren
That mortals never should be overboastful.
Outrage, once ripened, yields a bumper crop
Of retribution, of tears reaped in season.

Such are the penalties for their misdeeds. 900 (823)
Study them well; remember Greece and Athens,
And let no Persian in the future scorn
The guardian god of present happiness
And, by desiring more and still more, squander
Prosperity. Zeus is a stringent judge
Of willful overreach, a heavy censor.
Though Xerxes has been chastened well already,
Remind him, all the same, in gentle phrases,
To cease offending god with wide-mouthed violence.

And you, my darling, his devoted mother,
Go to the palace and selecting there
Whichever garment best will cloak his shame,
Ride out to meet your son. In his distress,
His fingernails have clawed the gowns of state
To shreds and patches. You should be the one 915 (837)
To daub his tears, because, as I well know,
He will accept his mother's consolation
Only.
I must return now to the darkness.
Goodbye, old friends. Even in times of trouble
Delight yourselves each day with trifling pleasures.
All wealth is worthless in the underworld.

The Ghost of Dareius descends into his tomb.

Chorus leader:

Now that I know our current and our future
Troubles, I ache for every Eastern tribe.

Queen:

O god, so many worries rush at me!
But one concern has cut me to the quick:

My son's disgrace—the regal raiment hanging
In tatters from his body. I am going
To fetch fresh wraps from home and welcome him
With what scant pomp I can—I must not fail
My dearest darling in his darkest hour. 930 (851)

The Queen exits, left.

Chorus:
Strophe A

What glorious benefits we had,
What laws to guide the commonweal,
Back when the aged, capable,
And safe Dareius, like a god,
Ruled over us as emperor. 935
He was not overfond of war.

Antistrophe A

He used two kinds of methods—men-
At-arms to frighten enemies
And laws like towers to supervise
All that occurred in his domain. 940
Unbeaten and with all their limbs,
Our troops returned to happy homes.

Strophe B

Although he never crossed the Halys,
Never stirred from his fireplace,
How far he spread his empery— 945 (870)
He took towns on the Achelaus,
That neighbor with the land of Thrace
Down along the Strymon Sea;

Antistrophe B

Then citadels on higher ground
Bowed to receive his governance, 950
As did the depots that are set
On either side of Helle's sound,
Remote Propontic settlements,
And towns along the Pontic Strait,

Strophe C

And all those wave-washed islands close
To our west coast, fanned out before us:
Lesbos is one, and Samos rich
In olive orchards, Andros (which
Is only yards from Tenos), Paros,
And Chios, Naxos, Mykonos. 960 (885)

Antistrophe C

He seized those lands ringed by the sea
That lie removed from the landmass—
Lemnos, Cnidos, Rhodes, the seat
Of Ikarus, and Cypriot
Paphos, Soloi, and Salamis,
Whose source-town caused this misery.

Epode

And he controlled by fixity of mind
The rich and populous Greek colonies
On the Ionian coast. Ready supplies
Of troops and allied tribes were then on hand.

Now, though, a sea-beating has wiped us out,
And there can be no doubt
It was the gods that fixed us with this loss.

Xerxes enters, right, in rags, riding in a battered palanquin, his retainers also in rags.

Xerxes:
Astrophic

Ah! suddenly unfortunate,
I stumbled on a hateful fate. 975 (909)
Some god has jumped up and with bloody
Vengeance crushed the Persian race.
Wretched as I am already,
What suffering is to come? One glance
At these imposing veterans,
And all my sinews are unstrung.

Oh Zeus,
I wish the doom of death had hid me

Deep down beneath the earth among
My ranks upon ranks of casualties.

Chorus:

Oh High King, alas, alas,
The Persian power was once revered!
How glorious our army was.
Fine outfits clothed our soldiers' bodies—
Some god has cut them all to shreds.
Earth groans for the boys she reared
To die for Xerxes, glutter of Hades.

In dense and countless multitudes,
Platoons of soldiers, bow in hand,
The entire flower of the land,
Marched off to dwell in darkness. We
Groan for our lost security.
O King, how wretched: Asia is
Bent over double on her knees.

Strophe A
Xerxes:

Here I am—Woe!—the object of
Your lamentation; to my nation,
My fatherland, a source of grief.

Chorus:

Yes, I shall send you, in salute,
A cursing and accurséd shout,
A Mariandynian lament
Choked with sobbing, dissonant.

Antistrophe A
Xerxes:

Go on, raise a discordant cry
Brimming with woes and tears because
My guardian god has turned on me.

Chorus:

I, with the help of our sad state,
Shall cry out to commemorate

Your losses, our sea-stricken men.
Sobbing will rattle in the groan.

Strophe B

XERXES:

Some foreigner-repellant power,
Some plank-destroying god of war,
Backs the Ionian cause.
Each night he scours the open seas
And that accursed shore.

CHORUS:

Cry Woe! Look back at all that you have lost!
Where is the rest of your expansive host?
Where have your guardsmen gone? I mean, such men as
Ecbatanian Sousikanes,
Pelagon, Pharnadakes, Dotamas?
Sousas and Psammis? Agbatas?

Antistrophe B

XERXES:

I left them where I saw them last.
During the battle they were tossed
From their Phoenician ship.
Salamis with a sharp outcrop
Now pins them to its coast.

CHORUS:

Cry Woe! Come, tell us where Pharnouchos is
And noble Ariomardos. Tharybis
And Memphis—are they lost with Artembares,
Masistris, and Hystaichamas? Where is
The lord Seualkes? With genteel Lilaios?
We need to know all. Satisfy us.

Strophe C

XERXES:

Woeful, woeful—they beheld
Abominable old
Athens and in a quick sweep of the oar
Exhaled their last gasp on the shore.

CHORUS:

Where is that flower of our land,
The faithful Eye who reckoned myriads of men?
He was the favorite son of Batanouchus, son
Of Seisames, Megabates' heir.
Oibares, Parthus the Renowned—
How could you have left them there?
Weep for the troops who were cut down.
You speak of trouble
Beyond all trouble.
Woe for our Persian noblemen.

Antistrophe C

XERXES:

You move me with your wryneck's call;
You speak of unforgettable
Disasters for my comrades, woes on woes.
My heart keeps mourning for the loss.

CHORUS:

So many men we long to see:
Xanthes with his myriad of Mysians;
Anchares heading a brigade of Arians;
Then there's Diaixis and Arsakes,
Captains of the cavalry;
Then there's Lithimnas and Dadakes,
And Tolmos ravenous for war.
I stand aghast—
So large a host,
And none attend your tented car.

Strophe D

XERXES:

All of the army's generals are gone.

CHORUS:

All gone without a grave.

XERXES:

Woe for them, woe.

Chorus:

You gods have struck us with a sudden blow. 1065 (1005)
Calamity glared once, and it was done.

Antistrophe D

Xerxes:

Our old luck failed; defeat has struck us down.

Chorus:

Yes, we have all been struck.

Xerxes:

By fresh regret.

Chorus:

Our fortune failed when we engaged their fleet.
The Persians are unlucky on campaign. 1070

Strophe E

Xerxes:

How are we not? Already wrecked, I suffer
Afresh from so much lack of a parade.

Chorus:

Wrecker of Persia, what is not destroyed?

Xerxes:

Do you discern these rags, my regal apparel?

Chorus:

I see. I see.

Xerxes:

This bow without a quarrel? 1075

Chorus:

What did you save?

Xerxes:

An archer's empty coffer.

Chorus:

So many set forth; you return with little.

Xerxes:

We lack protection.

Chorus:

And the Greeks love battle.

Antistrophe E

Xerxes:

They worship battle. I cannot believe
That we have suffered such catastrophe. 1080 (1027)

Chorus:

You mean the loss of all our men at sea?

Xerxes:

Yes, the disaster made me rend my dress.

Chorus:

A shameful sight.

Xerxes:

Disgrace beyond disgrace.

Chorus:

Twofold and threefold

Xerxes:

joy for foes, our grief.

Chorus:

Our strength is lamed.

Xerxes:

And me without a train! 1085

Chorus:

Because the sea took vengeance on our men.

Strophe F

Xerxes:

March for the palace, weeping as you go.

Chorus:

Misery, misery, woe on woe.

Xerxes:

Now when I lead, you sing the antiphon.

Chorus:

Woes for the woeful from the woebegone.

Xerxes:

Cry like the wryneck; join your song with mine.

Chorus:

Ah, ah,
The burden is heavy. Yes, I feel the pain.

Antistrophe F

Xerxes:

Row with your arms now; groan in sympathy.

Chorus:

I cannot keep from weeping. Woe is me.

Xerxes:

Now when I lead, you sing the antiphon.

Chorus:

O suzerain, the burden will be mine.

Xerxes:

Now launch your lamentation overseas.

Chorus:

Ah, ah,
Bruising blows are mixed in with our cries.

Strophe G

XERXES:

Drum your chest now; rave like Mysians.

CHORUS:

Pitiful, pitiful downfall. 1100

XERXES:

Pluck at the gray beards on your chins.

CHORUS:

My fingers dig. I wail and wail.

XERXES:

Now raise a cry.

CHORUS:

I must obey.

Antistrophe G

XERXES:

Tear with your fingers; shred your dresses. 1105

CHORUS:

Pitiful, pitiful downfall.

XERXES:

Pluck out your hair and grieve our losses.

CHORUS:

My fingers dig. I wail and wail.

XERXES:

Weep now, weep.

CHORUS:

The tears won't stop. 1110 (1065)

Epode

Xerxes:

I lead; you sing the antiphon.

Chorus:

Undone, undone.

Xerxes:

Start marching toward my palace, joyless.

Chorus:

Alas, alas.

Xerxes:

Shout your grief throughout the city. 1115

Chorus:

King, I am crying, crying loud.

Xerxes:

Keep wailing; but march delicately.

Chorus:

The Persian earth is hard to tread.

Xerxes:

Warships with triple-banks of oars!

Chorus:

The warships killed our warriors. 1120

Xerxes:

Walk with me to the palace now.

Chorus:

Yes, we will join you, crying Woe.

Xerxes, his three retainers, and the twelve Persian elders exit on foot toward the palace, left.

Seven against Thebes

Characters:

Eteocles, son of Oedipus and king of Thebes
Scout for Thebes
Chorus of Theban women
Antigone and Ismene, sisters of Eteocles
Herald of Thebes

Setting: *The acropolis of Thebes. Eteocles stands before a group of male citizens. Behind him stand the seven members of his retinue (facing the audience): his retainer and six warriors armed with spears and shields.*

Eteocles:

Citizens of the town that Cadmus founded,
Whoever occupies the city's stern,
Manning the rudder in a lidless vigil,
Stakes his reputation on providing
Just what the time requires. If we should triumph,
God would win the praise; but, if we fail
(Perish the very thought of it!), one name,
Eteocles, would sound out many times
In shouts and lamentations everywhere.
May Zeus Defender prove true to his title
For old King Cadmus's town.
And now *your* duties:
Whether still shy of the strength of manhood,
Diminished by the years or yet enjoying
Vigor of body—all of you, secure
The city and the altars of our gods
So that their worship never be destroyed.
Defend our offspring and the Earth, our mother,
Our dearest nourisher. All doting worry
While you crawled across her kindly soil,
She reared you to be householders and spearmen
Trustworthy in her hour of need.
Thus far

The gods have tipped the balance in our favor.
Week after week we have resisted siege
And, for the most part, our defensive tactics
Succeeded, by the grace of god. But now
The city's seer, our herdsman of the birds,
Has used his craft, his ears and wits, to learn
Futurity from wingéd messengers.
There was no need for fire. A reigning king
Of the prophetic realm, he has divined
That the most massive Argive army yet
Has gathered in the night and plots against
Our circuit walls.
Rush to the battlements,
All of you; don your armor and guard the archways.
Leave no breach in the breastworks; man the scaffolds
Around the towers and never give an inch
Before the gates. Be brave now, hold your ground
Against this tribe of alien invaders.
God will guide all to its rightful end.

To reconnoiter their positions I
Have sent out scouts and spies who, rest assured,
Will come back well informed. Their field reports
Will keep me far ahead of all surprises.

As the citizens exit through the right eisodos, *the Scout enters hurriedly through the left* eisodos *and approaches Eteocles.*

Scout:

Eteocles, most noble king of Thebes,
I scouted out their movements at firsthand
And have returned with sound intelligence:

Seven, the number of the savage chiefs
Who drained a bull's blood in a blackened shield,
Lathered their hands therein and promised Ares,
Enyo, and gore-adoring Terror either
To storm by force the citadel of Cadmus
And rip up its foundations, or to die
And leave our land a quicksand thick with blood.

In honor of their parents back in Argos
They clipped off braids and bound them as mementos

Tearfully to the chariot of Adrastus,
And still no hint of mercy left their lips.
Courage the smithy, and their will the iron,
These lions had all Ares in their eyes.

The proof of this report is not far off: 60 (54)
I left them casting lots to find which leader
Would march his troops against which gate of Thebes.

So quickly now, pick out our stoutest champions
And station them at each of the approaches.
Already near at hand, armed Argive forces 65
Are rushing nearer. Dust has dimmed the air.
Bright slaver from the stallion's steaming muzzles
Flecks the plain. Now like a wise ship's captain
Batten down the gates before the gales
Of Ares blow. A land-borne wave is breaking, 70
A wave of soldiers. Face the crisis, therefore,
Without a moment lost. I shall remain
Your loyal, watchful eye, and my reports
Will be so lucid you yourself will see,
In safety, all our struggles at the gates. 75 (68)

The Scout rushes off down the left eisodos, *leaving Eteocles alone with his retinue in the center of the orchestra.*

Eteocles:

O Zeus and Earth, O gods of garrisons,
And you, fell Fury, you, paternal Curse,
Do not wreck Thebes, do not uproot it wholly
From Greece and leave the remnants as our foes'
Reward. Do not impose the captive yoke 80
On this free land and citadel of Cadmus.
My prayers are in our common interest.
Prosperous cities honor their gods best.

As Eteocles exits down the right eisodos *with his retinue, a Chorus of Theban women, at first divided into three groups of four, enters through the left* eisodos. *The first group begins singing as soon as it is in view of the audience.*

Chorus 1:

My worries are weighty, my panic raving.
Our foes broke camp and are coming closer. 85

Chorus 2:

The foremost horsemen are pouring toward us.
A mouthless messenger, dust in the distance,
Clearly proclaims the coming truth.

Chorus 1:

Chargers in armor pound the plains,
Sound in my ears, rushing and roaring, 90 (86)
A cascade's constant clatter on rocks.

Chorus 2:

Hover above us, gods and goddesses;
Whoop and ward the onslaught off.

Chorus 1:

Eager soldiers with gleaming shields
Are closing quickly, hunting the city. 95

Chorus 2:

Who guides and guards us? What god or goddess?
What ancient image should I implore?

Chorus 1:

Deities settled on blessed thrones,
This crisis requires that we clasp your statues.

Chorus 2:

Why do we wait here, wailing so? 100

Chorus 1:

Those shields are clashing—haven't you heard them?

Chorus 2:

If not now, we will never offer
Garlands and gowns, gifts for salvation.

Chorus 1:

That sound is not from a single spear.

Chorus (all):

Ares, our author, our ancient father, 105 (104)
Will you betray the city you settled?
Save us, god of the golden helmet;
Look to the land you once loved well.

Strophe A

Gods of the towers, listen to our pleas:
Women who fear that they will soon be slaves 110
Beg you to save their town. Already waves
Approach the walls; slant-crested enemies
Are hurtling toward us, riding Ares' breath.
Drive off the soldiers, Zeus. You are Almighty.
Come slay the Argives circling Cadmus's city. 115
The bits are rattling in the stallions' teeth;
Spears close us round. Already seven lots
Have chosen seven chieftains. Glare
From their resplendent riding gear
Designates each at each of seven gates. 120 (127)

Antistrophe A

Athena, daughter of Zeus and lover of war,
Come down and, Pallas, drive them from our fortress.
You too, Poseidon, sea-god, lord of horses,
Free us from terror with your fishing spear.
Come, Ares, prove you are your daughter's father 125
By fighting to defend her husband's town;
And, Kypris, guard us as you would your kin,
Your children, since you are our ancient mother.
We draw close to your statues, begging you,
Frantically crying. O Lycian lord, 130
Wolf down the invading horde
While Leto's maiden daughter shoots her bow.

Strophe B

All round us rattle of axle in socket;
Queen Hera, answer us.
Footboards creaking, chariot racket; 135 (153)
O darling Artemis.
Spears are brandished now, air vexed

To frenzy—what will happen next?
What will the city suffer? God
Is pushing us but down what road?

Antistrophe B

Our high walls feel the slinger's stones;
O Phoebus, favor us.
The gates reecho clashing bronze.
Athena, daughter of Zeus,
The power to determine who
Will win this war resides with you.
So come, O Onka, tranquil queen,
Protect your seven-gated town.

Eteocles enters, right, with his retinue and stands at the edge of the orchestra, watching the Chorus with disgust.

Strophe C

You gods and goddesses can save us
By shoring up our buttresses.
Do not betray us, do not leave us
To hordes of drawling enemies.
The city staggers under war.
We lift our virgin hands in prayer.

Antistrophe C

Saviors, darling gods, embrace
Our walls to show how much you love us.
Let all we gave in sacrifice
Rise in your memories. Come save us.
May our love of sacred rights
Weigh heavily upon your thoughts.

Eteocles, followed by his retinue, strides brusquely into the middle of the orchestra to rebuke the Chorus.

Eteocles:

Incorrigible creatures, I ask you:
Is this the best way to preserve the city?
Is this support for soldiers under siege?
Groveling at the feet of guardian gods,
Whimpering, barking? Solid citizens

Detest you.
Neither in good times nor in bad,
May I share hearth and home with womankind.
When women rule, their brashness knows no bounds;
But, let them tremble, and home and city shake
Along with them. By running wild and shrieking,
You have reduced your fellow citizens
To panting cowardice. The enemy
Outside the ramparts grows in confidence,
And our own people rout us from within.
Whoever lives with women lives with trouble.

Henceforth if any subject, female, male,
Or gelding in the middle, disobeys
My martial law, the sentence will be death—
No dissident will sidestep public stoning.

External affairs are a concern for men,
And council-houses no place for the ladies.
Stop making trouble for me. Go indoors.
You hear? Or am I speaking to the deaf?

CHORUS:
Strophe A

Dear son of Oedipus, their chariots
Terrified us—we heard the whirring spokes,
The ridgepoles rattling on yokes,
The teeth of horses clattering on wrought-iron bits.

ETEOCLES:

What, when a ship is weathering a storm,
Has a sea captain ever found salvation
By running from the stern up to the prow?

CHORUS:
Antistrophe A

We thought of gods and ran to these high shrines
When stones came raining down upon the city.
Here we shall make our last entreaty,
Begging the Blessed Ones to come to our defense.

Eteocles:

First call on towers to shiver spears instead— 195 (216)
The gods will make their choice. You know the saying
"Deities abandon a city beaten."

Chorus:
Strophe B

Never, so long as my days last,
May gods forsake their houses here.
Never may foreign troops infest 200
Our citadel with hostile fire.

Eteocles:

Think no evil when addressing gods.
Obedience is the mother of Success
And wife to Safety. So the proverb goes.

Chorus:
Antistrophe B

The strength of heaven is higher still. 205
In hard times, harsh anxieties,
It often pulls the shiftless soul
Out of the fog that clouds his eyes.

Eteocles:

Men are the ones who sacrifice to gods
Before a battle and brave the enemy. 210 (231)
You women stay inside and keep your peace.

Chorus:
Strophe C

"Our town is free from devastation
And our walls stop hostile hordes
Thanks to the gods." What indignation
Makes you despise these words? 215

Eteocles:

I never would begrudge you prayers to heaven
But you are making all the people cowards.
Calm down, or at least refrain from panic.

Chorus:
Antistrophe C

As soon as I discerned that din,
That strange complexity of sound,
I ran for sanctuary, ran
Straight for hallowed ground.

Eteocles:

But when you hear news of the dead and wounded,
Don't snatch it up as an excuse for wailing.
Slaughter is simply what the war god feeds on.

Chorus leader:

Oh! not again: I hear the horses' panting.

Eteocles:

So, when you listen, listen less intently.

Chorus leader:

Foes close in and the citadel is groaning.

Eteocles:

Leave such things for me to contemplate.

Chorus leader:

I am afraid. More rattling shakes the gates.

Eteocles:

Hush now! Or will you terrify the town?

Chorus leader:

Band of the blessed, do not desert our walls!

Eteocles:

Damn you, why won't you hush up and be patient?

Chorus leader:

Civic gods, save me from slavery!

Eteocles:

You are the one enslaving me, and Thebes.

Chorus leader:

Smite them with lightning, Zeus Omnipotent.

Eteocles:

Zeus, what a race of women you created!

Chorus leader:

Miserable, yes—like men without a city.

Eteocles:

You let your tongue slip so while clutching statues?

Chorus leader:

All hope is absent; fear has seized my tongue. 240 (259)

Eteocles:

Please, will you grant me just a little favor?

Chorus leader:

Ask for it swiftly; I shall swiftly know.

Eteocles:

It is: be quiet, wretch; stop spreading terror.

Chorus leader:

I yield. I will accept fate like the others.

Eteocles:

Much better, I prefer this kind of talk
To what I heard before. Now, in addition,
Unhand the statues and with better purpose
Pray that the gods be allies and not saviors.

Pay close attention to this model hymn
And then trill it in turn, hallowed and hopeful,
The standard Greek song at a sacrifice
To hearten friends and drive out battle fear:

"Gods of the city, guardians of the markets,
Keepers of farm and pasture, Springs of Dirce
And Ismenos, our river gods, I promise
That, when we win and Thebes has been preserved,
Whole herds of cattle and flocks of sheep will wet
Your altars, and the city will suspend
The broken spears and trappings of our foes
As trophies in the forecourts of your temples."

So runs the prayer that you should give the gods.
No groans, no idle and unseemly shrieks—
None of you will escape your doom that way.

Meanwhile I will assign six challengers
Each to a gate to match their champions.
I will secure the seventh gate myself,
And quickly, too, before the heralds come
Carrying hasty, swiftly spreading rumors
And spark more flare-ups with their urgency.

Eteocles exits, right, with his retinue.

Strophe A

I heard him but my spirit cannot rest;
My worries loom too large. The fears that live
About my heart seethe with the horrid host
That has besieged us. I, a fluttering dove,
Can only dread the serpents who surround
My nestlings. They approached us all at once;
Numberless troops are hostile and at hand.
What will become of me? Everywhere stones
Are striking townsfolk. Please heed my entreaty,
Children of Zeus, and come support the sons
Of Cadmus. Save our soldiers; save the city.

Antistrophe A

What richer country could you call your home
If you betray us to these foreigners?
What about Dirce, the delicious stream
That earth-holder Poseidon so adores,
And all the Tethydes? Gods of our town,
Frighten the fiends who rush our battlements
So that they panic, throw their weapons down,

And perish at our hands. Our citizens
Will grant you ample glory as a prize.
Come save the city; come secure your shrines;
Answer entreaties tipped with piercing cries.

Strophe B

Sad, when Achaeans without shame
Hurl a venerable city
To Hades' halls in Heaven's name,
Enslave the people, strip the booty,
And leave a heap of cinders. Sadder,
However, when every mother's daughter
Feels braids yanked like a horse's bit
And all her garments torn away.
The city howls when emptied out.
The captive chattel, with one cry
Comprised of many, limps toward doom.
The fate I fear is cumbersome.

Antistrophe B

Still sadder when malicious grooms
Grasp at the green girls, the unwed,
And drag them from their father's homes
For hateful jostlings abroad.
The dead fare better. When the walls
Are breached, a thousand spectacles
Succeed, a thousand miseries:
Man trundles man; man slaughters man
And torches the remains. A haze
Intoxicates the entire town.
The mad, man-slaying god of war
Putrefies all that should be pure.

Strophe C

Shouts in the streets; the city walls in toils;
Men battling, some dying, some with spears;
Babes wailing for their mothers' bloody teats.
Invaders—full blood kin to pillagers:
Those that have spoils embracing those with spoils,
The have-nots partnering with the have-nots;
Each one intent, seeking the lion's share.
That next step down is easy to infer:

Antistrophe C

Dumped on the ground, the perishable goods
Rot in the sun—more sorrow for the eyes
Of strict housewives. All that the rich earth grows
Flows out in random streams of wastefulness.
The captive girls, now weeping battle brides,
Wait in the beds of their triumphant foes
Who enter nightly, eager to enjoy (367)
Their slaves' submission, tears, and misery.

Simultaneously, the Scout runs on stage, left, and Eteocles rushes on stage, right, with his retinue. The Chorus divides into two groups.

Chorus 1:

Dear friends, a scout, it seems, is rushing toward us,
Churning the axles of his feet. He must be
Bringing the king fresh tidings from the field.

Chorus 2:

Here comes the son of Oedipus himself,
And just in time to take in the report.
Urgency also stretches out his stride.

The Scout and Eteocles simultaneously arrive at orchestra-center.

Scout:

I know the foes' formations and will list
Their leaders and the gates they won by lot:

Already Tydeus like a beast was raging
To reach the Gate of Proitos when the prophet
Forbade the ford across the Ismenos
Because the river-sacrifice was grim.
But Tydeus was too keen, too mad for war.
Sibilant as the snake a boot has kicked up (381)
Sunning in the noontime heat, he spat
Reproach upon the seer, the son of Oikles,
Saying, "He cowers before fate and war."
Such was his taunt.
His mane, the three tall feathers
Atop his casque, cast awful, flickering shadows
Around him, and rattles on his shield's rim set

The very air atremble, and on that shield
A haughty blazon had been wrought: the heavens
Gleaming at night with all the stars and signs;
Dead-center of the shield a full moon shone,
The eldest of the stars, the eye of night.

Passion for battle makes him pace and snort
On their side of the river like a horse
Champing the bit and waiting and still waiting
The trumpet's signal and the charge that follows. 360 (394)

Whom will you set against this man? What fail-safe
Will stand before the Gate of Father Proitos
When bolts are lifted and the leaves drawn back?

Eteocles:

I do not fear a boast of cosmic scope.
Imagery never injured anyone,
And bells and plumes don't bite as spear-points do.
The blackness that you painted on his shield,
All tricked out with the stars of heaven, is easy—
Such emblems turn more properly prophetic
When turned against the man that wrongly reads them.
For if the "night" that is the loss of life
Should fall upon his eyes, that haughty emblem
Would properly apply to him that bears it.
The braggart has foretold his own destruction.

Here is the champion I choose to match him 375 (407)
Before the gate:

With a gesture Eteocles calls forth an armed man from his retinue.

The offshoot of Astacus,
Our noble native son. He hates proud words
And kneels before the throne of Reputation.
Slow to be base, he never plays the coward.
Sprung from the Sown Men whom our soil begot,
Whom Ares pruned and fostered, Melanippus
Is wholly native. Ares with a die-throw
Will gamble on the duel. Still, it is Justice,
Our hero's kin by birth, who sends him forth
To drive invasion from their common mother.

Melanippus departs, right.

CHORUS:
Strophe A

May the gods grant this champion
A blessed victory.
He marches forth to save our town.
Still, I must shudder, thinking of
The bloody ways men die
Fighting to safeguard those they love.

SCOUT:

May the gods grant that fortune favor him
Just as you have foretold.
Next Capaneus,
A second giant, and greater than the first,
Obtained our Shining Gate as the next lot.
His boasts are superhuman, know no bounds:
He vows, god willing, to unseat our city;
If heaven resists, not even Zeus's lightning
Will stop him, though it strike before his feet.
He likens lightning-flash and thunderbolt
To mere discomfort in the mid-day heat.
His blazon: a nude hero, torch in hand,
A blazing weapon wielded by a fist,
And in gold lettering the emblem utters
A motto: "I shall burn your city down."

What man could take the field against this terror,
Who face his boasts with steady knees? Come, send him.

ETEOCLES:

Again vainglory breeds our greater glory.
The tongue that utters mad, irrational thoughts
Accuses its own user. Capaneus
Can brag indeed. Girding his limbs for action
But flexing muscles in his mouth, this mortal
Dares shame the gods, projecting words like waves
High into heaven. They break on Zeus's court
With vain affront. I truly do believe
A fiery blast will torch *him* with all justice
And bear no likeness to the noontime haze
Of Helios.

Eteocles selects and dispatches, right, a second member of his retinue.

A champion has been posted
To meet this challenger, a fiery spirit,
But no fast-talker: mighty Polyphontes, 420 (448)
A civic sentinel and surety,
A man whom Artemis Before-the-Portal
And all the other deities support.

Come now and tell me of another man
That chance has posted to another gate. 425

Chorus:
Antistrophe A

May the man who hurled this boast
Against the city die,
Die by a sudden lightning-blast
Before he leaps upon my home,
Before he forces me, 430
At spear-point, from my private room.

Scout:

Now I will tell you who was next to win
A chance to breach our walls: a third lot spilled
Out of the hollow of the brazen helmet
For a third challenger, Eteoclus, 435 (459)
Who leads his troops to the Neistan gate.
He wheels his horses round and round in circles
And barely checks their urge to charge the city.
As their haughty nostrils pant, the whistles
Fixed to their headstalls screech like barbarous pipes. 440

No humble heraldry adorns his shield:
A man-at-arms mounts up a scaling-ladder
Into a fortress that he longs to raze.
He too is shouting out in letters, daring
Ares to drive him from the battlements. 445

Send out a man to seal the gate against him
And shut the yoke of slavery out of doors.

Eteocles selects and sends off, left, a third soldier from his retinue.

ETEOCLES:

Indeed he's on his way—Megareus,
Scion of Kreon and the Sown Men's seed,
A man who puts his boasting in his fists.
The flutes and chortles of the savage horses
Will faze him not at all when he goes marching
Before our walls; and he will either litter
Our land with victory mounds before he dies,
Or, living yet, defeat both man and image,
Sack the city on the shield, and fill
The hallways of his father with the spoils.

Come, bluster of another. Tell me all.

CHORUS:
Strophe B

Frontline defender of my house,
I pray that fortune help your cause
And harm our foes. Their frenzied souls
Vent reckless boasts against our walls.
May Zeus, the god of retribution,
Look angrily on their aggression.

SCOUT:

Fourth in the order, at the neighboring Gate
Of Onkan Pallas, stands Hippomedon,
Of massive cast and bulk. He too is shouting.
As he whirled that vast diameter
(The shield I mean) above his head, a shudder
Came over me—I cannot lie. No clumsy
Or two-bit blacksmith wrought and chased his blazon:
A Typhon purges from lungs full of fire
Black sulfur, the incendiary sister
Of conflagration. Plaited tails of vipers
Writhe in the border round the bloated belly.

This vessel full of Ares raised the warcry.
With horror on his brow, he wildly dances,
Bacchante-like, in view of our defenses.
It will be hard to guard against this man—
Terror already flaunts him at the gate.

Eteocles:

First off, Athena Onka, portal keeper,
Will stand by and, in scorn of arrogance,
Expel him like the viper that he is
For drawing too close to her fledglings' nest.

Eteocles selects from his retinue a fourth soldier, who displays the device on his shield to the audience.

Second, Hyperbius, dear son of Oinops,
Was chosen for this match long, long ago;
And now the choices he dismissed as chance
In retrospect reveal their divination
Of this predestined duel.
Our man is faultless
In spirit, form, and carriage of arms.
With perfect foresight Hermes joined these soldiers
In personal hatred long ago, and now
An enemy will face an enemy,
And from their blazons god will battle god.
Hippomedon, for his part, brandishes
A fire-breathing Typhon; against him, Zeus
Stands upright in Hyperbius's shield,
Poised to discharge the lightning in his fist.
Such are the two gods backing these contestants.
As Zeus is stronger and has vanquished Typhon,
So we are of the stronger, and our foes
Are properly the vanquished. It is fitting
These mortals battle as their emblems did.
The Zeus wrought on Hyperbius's shield
Will duly prove his savior in the end.

Hyperbius departs, right.

Chorus:

Antistrophe B

I am full sure the man who carries
The worst of Zeus's adversaries,
The very model of a lower
Divinity (a hideous power
Both mortals and immortals hate),
Will lose his head before the gate.

Scout:

May all be as you say. My next report
Tells of a fifth man stationed at the Gate
Of Boreas, beside the sepulcher
Of Amphion, son of Zeus. He swears upon
The sharp spear-tip he loves more than the gods,
More than the two eyes set within his skull,
That, in contempt of all that Zeus can do,
He'll lay the citadel of Cadmus low.

His mother, a huntress, whelped him on the mountains.
Though more than boy, he still falls shy of manhood.
His springtime grows toward harvest; downy whiskers
Sprout on his cheeks but his barbaric ways
Belie a name that means the "maiden-child."
His eyes glare like a Gorgon's when he charges.

Make no mistake—he too parades his boast
Before the gates: there on a shield of bronze,
His body's circular defender, stands
The man-devouring Sphinx, our city's bane,
A beaten, burnished, glimmering device
That bosses fasten to the rim. She dangles
A Theban from her claws so that our spears
Will strike him and do damage to our own.

Parthenopaios is the youth in question.
He will be no small merchant in the fray
Or disappoint the opportunities
This business trip has given him. Though born
Arcadian, he spent his youth in Argos
And now repays his rearing there in full
By shouting such loud threats against our ramparts.
May heaven never bring them to fulfillment.

Eteocles:

May all their sacrilegious braggadocio
Only provoke from heaven the same fate
That they intend for us—then would they all
Fall all together in complete disgrace.

To match the man you named we have our own—
He is demure; his hand eyes action only:

Eteocles selects a fifth soldier from his retinue.

Actor, the brother of Hippomedon.
This man would never let an idle tongue
Deluge a gate with mischievous aspersions;
Nor will he welcome one who wears the image
Of that detested beast. The Sphinx outside
Will blame the man who tried to bring her in
When dents have battered her beneath our walls.
God willing, all my words will come to pass. 555 (562)

Actor departs, left.

Chorus:
Strophe C

I hear the loud threats of a loudly
Threatening, impious host.
The words burrow into my breast;
My hair rears up and stands on end.
Our gods, if they are truly godly,
Will wipe this blot out of the land.

Scout:

Now let me tell you of our sixth assailant,
A modest seer but a mighty soldier:
While marching to the Gate of Omolos,
Amphiaraus cursed the mighty Tydeus,
Calling him cutthroat, quarreler with Thebes,
Pedant of all things ruinous to Argos,
Summoner of Furies, slave to slaughter,
And guide to wrongful courses for Adrastus.

Next, lifting up his eyes, the prophet summoned 570 (574)
Your brother, the heroic Polyneices.
Splitting in two a name that means "much strife,"
He dwelt on how it ends, said it again,
And this loud proclamation left his lips:

"How grand your quest! O how the gods must love it!
A tale for all posterity to boast of—
Leading foreign forces to destroy
Your father's birthplace and the homes of gods.
Will retribution stop your mother's fonts

From flowing tears? How will your fatherland
Support you in the future, when your spear
Has made quick work of razing it to nothing?
A prophet still, I know that I will nourish
This hostile land when I lie underneath it.
Let's fight. It's certain *I* will die with honor."

So he spoke, calm beside his shield of bronze.
No blazon paints its face, for he would be
True bravery instead of seeming so.
Sowing the furrows of a fruitful mind,
He harvests vineyards of advice. I urge you
To send your best and brightest to oppose him.
Powerful is the man who fears the gods.

Eteocles:

Too bad that fortune never makes exceptions
For pious men that run with infidels.
In every dealing there is nothing worse
Than bad companions. Let that bitter fruit
Never be plucked. The field of folly yields
Death as its harvest. When the reverent man
Goes sailing with hot-blooded buccaneers,
He drowns too when a god destroys the ship.
When all his neighbors cast out helpless beggars
And scorn the shrines, the just man, though he stand
Apart, will fall into the general snare
And feel the indiscriminate lash of god.
Just so this mighty seer, Oikles' son,
Though noble, upright, chaste and reverent,
Has foolishly conspired with foulmouthed braggarts.
God willing, he will share their utter ruin
And march beside them to a camp so distant
That none return.
I doubt therefore that he
Will even rush the gate. Though lacking all
Weakness of spirit and cowardice of thought,
He knows that he will meet his fate in battle,
That is, if oracles bear any fruit.
Loxias either holds his tongue or utters
What one requires.

Eteocles selects a sixth and last soldier from his retinue. Only his retainer remains.

Still, I shall set against him
The mighty Lasthenes, a porter loath
To let a stranger in. A veteran
In mind, he sports a new-recruit's physique.
His glance is kick-swift, and his thrusting hand
Knows just the instant when a lifted shield
Exposes opportunity. All the same,
Success in battle is the gift of gods.

Lasthenes departs, right.

Chorus:

Antistrophe C

Heed, O gods, our righteous prayers
And bring them to fulfillment: save
The citadel by driving off
War's miseries, an armed inroad.
May Zeus come stand before our towers,
Level his lightning, strike them dead.

Scout:

Now I must tell you that the seventh man,
Who won the seventh gate, is your own brother.
What curses he calls down upon the city!
He vows that, when the heralds pronounce him king
Atop our towers, he will toast his triumph
With battle hymns and close with you at last.
Then, if he kills you, he could rest in peace
Beside you. But if you, the man who shamed him
With exile, should survive, he will avenge
That exile with like exile and expel you.
These are the boasts of mighty Polyneices,
And he invokes the deities of your father
And fatherland to ratify his prayers.

His freshly fashioned and well rounded shield
Features a finely crafted double emblem:
A modest maid guiding a golden soldier.
She says her name is Justice, and the script
Continues, "I shall bring this soldier home,

And he shall live again in his home city
And royal palace."
Such are their devices.
Soon you will find my words at every point
Beyond reproach. You, you alone must choose
How we will steer our city through these straits.

The Scout exits, left.

Eteocles:

O god-enraged and god-repellent house
Of Oedipus, brimful of weeping! Ah,
My father's curses now have come to pass.
But this is not the time to rant and wail.
Some even more insufferable grief
May still be out there waiting to be born.

Soon we shall witness to what fate that emblem
Impels the fellow with the fitting name
Of "Polyneices" when his gilded motto
Proves babytalk and leads him far from home,
Wandering in his wits. If virgin Justice,
Daughter of Zeus, were truly marshaling
His words and deeds, he swiftly would prevail;
But she has never favored or esteemed him,
Not when he stuck his head out of the darkness
Of mother's womb, not in the nursery,
Not in his youth, and never since the beard
Crept down his cheeks and gathered on his chin.

Nor do I think she stands beside him now,
When he lays waste to his paternal lands.
For with all justice Justice would be called
A goddess falsely named if she condoned
The machinations of this shameless man.

Steeled by these thoughts I go myself to face him.
What other would more justly serve the turn?
Captain with captain, enemy with enemy,
Brother with brother, I shall fight with him.
Bring me my greaves! Be quick about it. Bring
All my defenses against bow and spear.

Eteocles' retainer exits, right.

Chorus leader:

Dearest of men and child of Oedipus,
Don't duplicate the anger of a man
Whose very name spells trouble. Rather accept
That your Cadmeans fight the Argives for you.
Their blood would leave no stain. The slaughter of kin
Is suicide within a family—
That sort of bloodguilt never dies away.

Eteocles:

Whatever a man endures, let him endure it
Without disgrace—this is the only glory
Among the dead. No one will spread the fame
Of shameful and disreputable deeds.

The retainer returns with a spear, a shield, and armor. During the rest of the episode, Eteocles puts his armor on, piece by piece.

Chorus:
Strophe A

Why so hasty, child? Resist
The spear-mad rage that fills your breast.
Root out this necrotic lust.

Eteocles:

Since heaven so insists and Phoebus so
Detests the seed of Laius, let us go
Careening downstream on the Wailing River.

Chorus:
Antistrophe A

Biting and savage is the goad
Rushing you into homicide.
The fruit is bitter, the blood bad.

Eteocles:

The hateful Curse of my beloved father
Hovers in front of my unweeping eyes,
Repeating, "Glory first, then destiny."

Chorus:
Strophe B

Don't give in. None will say that you lacked mettle 705 (698)
So long as you contrive to win the battle.
Later, go soothe the gods with sacrifice
Until the black-clad Fury quits the house.

Eteocles:

The gods ceased caring for me long ago;
The only gift they seek is my demise. 710
Why should I stand here shrinking from destruction?

Chorus:
Antistrophe B

Stop while you can. In time this driving force
May steer your spirit to a different course.
Though she is currently high winds and froth
She soon may send you less insistent breath. 715

Eteocles:

The curse of Oedipus is boiling over.
Those figures in my nightmares, the dividers
Of our inheritance, were all too true.

Chorus leader:

Though women offend you, heed us just this once.

Eteocles:

Say something reasonable; be concise. 720 (713)

Chorus leader:

Don't walk the road down to the seventh gate.

Eteocles:

Mere words will never blunt my whetted purpose.

Chorus leader:

God honors even unheroic conquest.

Eteocles:

A soldier cannot countenance that phrase.

Chorus leader:

You want to harvest your own brother's blood?

Eteocles:

When god sends trouble, none may step aside.

Eteocles, now fully armed, exits with his retainer, left.

Chorus:

Strophe A

I fear a wrecker of the house,
A goddess unlike any other,
The Fury summoned of a father,
A ruthless, truthful prophetess.
I fear she has fulfilled the wrath
Of that fierce madman Oedipus.
I fear he cursed his sons to death.

Antistrophe A

A stranger splits their heritage,
A Chalybian, an outsider,
A bitter Scythian divider
Of wealth—crude iron's double edge.
Cutting them out of the estate,
He grants them so much acreage
As corpses merit, their death-right.

Strophe B

Once each of them, as kith and kin,
Has perished by the other's thrust,
Once thick dark blood has cloyed the dust,
What priest can wash away the stain?
Who can release this family? Fresh woes
Have joined with old ones and beset the house.

Antistrophe B

I conjure up an old misdeed.
The doer paid, but the transgression

Returns for the third generation:
King Laius thrice solicited
Apollo but received just one reply—
"To save Thebes, die without posterity."

Strophe C

All the same, seized by lunacy,
He sired a fortune all his own—
Oedipus, who dispatched his father
And sowed the furrow of his mother,
The sacred soil where he was sown.
Thus grew the bloody family tree.
Madness alone led mother and son
Through nuptial rites and made them one.

Antistrophe C

Our troubles are as fitful as sea-swell.
A first wave breaks; another bounds
With triple strength and crashes loudly
Upon the rear-deck of the city.
Between the hold and ocean stands
A fragile plank, a wooden wall.
I fear the foundering dynasty
Will drag Thebes down into the sea.

Strophe D

It's painful, when the bill comes due,
To pay a curse off, an old debt.
The damages do not pass by.
Merchants whose coffers overflow
Have no choice but to toss their freight
Into the sea when waves are high.

Antistrophe D

Whom have the gods, the folk who share
Our common hearth, and all the tribes
That throng earth's surface, coast to coast,
Admired and celebrated more
Than Oedipus, who salvaged Thebes
From that flesh-eating, flying beast?

Strophe E

Yet, when he found the whole thing out,
The wretch reviled his wedding-ties
And raged and ranted and went mad,
Committing twin atrocities—
The hand that killed his father put
The offspring-execrating eyes
Out of his head.

Antistrophe E

Enraged at his sons' insolence,
O how he tipped his tongue with spite,
Vowing that, at some future time,
Their iron-wielding hands would split
Equally their inheritance.
I fear the Fury, her swift feet
At last have come.

A Messenger enters, left.

Messenger:

All of you, daughters born of native mothers, 795 (792)
Rest easy: Thebes has slipped the captive yoke.
The braggart winds of violent men have fallen.
The city shipped no water, weathered all
That waves could muster. Now she rides at ease.
The towers held, and we sealed up the gates
With notaries that fought them, man to man.
At six of seven portals, everything
Has turned out perfectly. But Lord Apollo,
The sacred doorman of the seventh gate,
Has claimed our seventh champion to punish
The house of Oedipus for the mistake
That Laius made so many years ago.

Chorus:

What is this? Further bad news for the city?

Messenger:

The town is safe; the brothers, though, the sons—

CHORUS:

Whom do you mean? Your words will drive me mad.

MESSENGER:

Calm down and listen. Oedipus's sons—

CHORUS:

Alas, I am a prophet of disaster!

MESSENGER:

—by all accounts tumbled into the dust—

CHORUS:

Both men lie dead? Give us the worst at once.

MESSENGER:

—and died, each brother at his brother's hands.
A Wrath, a Fury whom they shared, struck home
And this one god has utterly erased
A race that was accursed. We must find means
To laud and to lament the same events.
The city has survived; it was the leaders,
The brace of brothers, who have split their claim
Straight down the middle with wrought Scythian steel.
Since, in obedience to their father's curse,
They met their fate headfirst, each will inherit,
As his estate, the plot that is his grave.

CHORUS:

Astrophic

Zeus and you deities who guard our towers,
Defenders of our city, should I hail
Safety with shouts of triumph or bewail
These misbegotten, fiend-chased warriors?

Each perished in accordance with his name:
Eteocles was true acclaim,
And Polyneices quarrelsome.

Strophe A

The ripe black curse of Oedipus
Has put an end to Laius's house.

A moral frost stiffens my breast.
Hearing of lives cast to the dust,
Of deaths that were a wrongful doom,
I sing a tune fit for a tomb,
The mad song of the maenad. Sad
Indeed, the ballad of the blade.

Antistrophe A

A father's sleepless proclamation
Has landed on its destination,
And Laius's mistaken choice
Fought its way back to his race.
Thebes is my worry—heaven's will
Does not grow dull.

Pallbearers enter, carrying the bodies of Polyneices and Eteocles.

Double objects of our grief,
Your actions were beyond belief.
The miserable wounds your swords
Delivered are unfit for words.

The pallbearers set the litter down at orchestra-center.

Astrophic

Here is the proof of what we had heard told—
The doubly fated agonies have come.
Our sorrows are twofold;
Our losses twin;
What can we say but that young griefs have grown
From old ones and inherited their home?

Friends, let us launch them, let us sigh fair winds.
Lift up your arms; keep stroking with your hands,
Your plashing oars, until we pull
The ship with the lone sable sail
Beyond the Lake of Acheron
To the far shore, the shore
That Lord Apollo never treads upon,
The sunless shore that welcomes everyone.

Antigone and Ismene enter, right.

But look! Ismene and Antigone
Have come to tend to a sad chore:
Keening their brothers. They will pour
Their double dirge forth earnestly
Out of their fine deep bosoms. First,
Though, we should sing the Furies' tune
And Hades' hateful victory ode.

Of all the women who have tied
A sash around a spacious gown
You are the two most brother-cursed.
I weep, I groan; shrill honesty
Trills from my heart into the sky:

The Chorus divides into two groups of six and addresses the corpses.

Strophe B
Chorus 1:

Stubborn, stubborn pair,
At odds with kin and friend,
You were industrious
Woe-workers to the end;
Fools, who used the spear
To sack your father's house.

Chorus 2:

Miserable men who met their doom
Miserably, ruining their home.

Antistrophe B
Chorus 1:

You who devastated
Your house from floor to roof,
Who dreamed of total rule
But only found more strife,
Now lie conciliated,
Reconciled through steel.

Chorus 2:

The mighty Fury of Oedipus
Must have brought this all to pass.

Strophe C

Chorus 1:

Striking the left side (an ill omen),
Two spears have shattered bones
That set in one womb, in one woman.
O fiend-afflicted brains,
The curse in each compelled you both
To share and share alike one death.

Chorus 2:

You are enumerating blows
Leveled by a silent force,
A fixed fate, and a father's curse.
You speak of what hewed flesh and house.

Antistrophe C

Chorus 1:

Sorrow has spread throughout the town;
The towers heave a sigh;
The earth groans, since it loved these men.
And now the property
Devolves—the wealth that ruined them,
That sparked a war and proved their doom.

Chorus 2:

With hearts like blades they spilt the land
Equally, so no family-friend
Can say that the executor,
The war-god Ares, was unfair.

Strophe D

Chorus 1:

Blows of iron have struck today;
Blows of iron are yet to come.
Should someone ask me, *How?* I'd say,
Shovels beside their father's tomb.

Chorus 2:

A shrill, resonant wail escorts
The corpses home. The grief and pain

Rise on their own; the tears roll down.
Piping a mirthless, earnest tune,
My heart wilts over two dead lords.

Antistrophe D

Chorus 1:

Normally here we would recite
The great deeds of the fallen leaders,
Years of service to the state,
Heaps on heaps of slain invaders.

Chorus 2:

Of all that wear the name of mother,
Their mother knew the greatest pain.
Her second husband her first son,
She bore him siblings who went on
To die in turn, killing each other.

Strophe E

Chorus 1:

Fraternal in the grave as in the seed,
They never shared their lives like kin; though mad
Their struggle to outdo each other,
They ended it together.

Chorus 2:

Lives, as liquid, mixed in dust,
The feud has ceased; the brothers rest
Consanguineous. Harsh is the judge
Known by the name of Iron Edge,
A severance smelted in the East.
Harsh, too, is Ares, who fulfilled
What Oedipus had willed
By duly splitting the bequest.

Antistrophe E

Chorus 1:

They have inherited their father's plot;
They have received, poor souls, a gift from god
Beneath their backs: a boundless stretch
Downward to Hades, each.

Chorus 2:

What misdeeds and misery
Ornament their family tree!
Whole generations put to rout,
Curses have raised a victory shout
Raucously over the deceased.
Where they received the family wounds
Delusion's trophy stands.
The fit that maddened them has passed.

Antigone: Struck as you struck,
Ismene: you slew and were slain,

Antigone: Tilt and target
Ismene: of tip and shaft.

Antigone: Pitiless prey,
Ismene: poor predator,

Antigone: Trundled home
Ismene: with your toppled twin,

Antigone: Occasion compels us
Ismene: to keen your corpses,

Antigone: Though much mourning
Ismene: maddens the mind,

Antigone: And sorrow harrows
Ismene: my heart of hearts.

Antigone: Though doom-driven,
Ismene: you were dauntless, too,

Antigone: In killing the kinsman
Ismene: who killed you in kind.

Antigone: Twice we must eye
Ismene: and tell of the twin

ANTIGONE:
Suicides, slayers

ISMENE:
of sibling and self.

CHORUS:
You wedded a Doom
Regal at first
A veiled Avenger

dowered with debt,
then a father's phantom,
with a violent past.

Antigone and Ismene turn to Polyneices' corpse.

ANTIGONE:
What a surprise

ISMENE:
welcomed the wanderer—

ANTIGONE:
Gasping, he gave up

ISMENE:
his ghost in the gateway,

ANTIGONE:
His felling and falling

ISMENE:
factual now.

ANTIGONE:
Our hexed house

ISMENE:
has been halved again.

ANTIGONE:
Fraternal interments

ISMENE:
tap my heart out.

ANTIGONE:
Thrice now there were thrusts;

ISMENE:
violence has thrived here.

CHORUS:
You wedded a Doom
Regal at first
A veiled Avenger

dowered with debt,
then a father's phantom,
with a violent past.

The sisters address Eteocles, then Polyneices.

ANTIGONE:
Your knowledge and suffering

ISMENE:
are nothing now;

ANTIGONE:
You learned your lesson

ISMENE:
no later than he,

ANTIGONE:
After you turned back

ISMENE:
to the town of your birth

ANTIGONE:
To embrace your brother

ISMENE:
with blade in hand.

ANTIGONE:
Sad tale to sing of

ISMENE:
and sight to see.

ANTIGONE:
So many disasters

ISMENE:
and such great sorrow

ANTIGONE:
Have harmed our house,

ISMENE:
the hearth of Thebes

ANTIGONE:
And me most of all,

ISMENE:
and much more me.

ANTIGONE:
You were both most woeful

ISMENE:
in the world of men.

ANTIGONE:
Out of the sky

ISMENE:
a stupor stuck you.

ANTIGONE:
Where should we bury them

ISMENE:
and build their barrows?

ANTIGONE:
Though father will twitch

ISMENE:
if they touch his tomb,

ANTIGONE:
Find them a place

ISMENE:
in the family plot.

The Herald enters, right, and stands between the bodies at orchestra-center.

HERALD:
The proclamations of the drumhead court
Summoned to session for the public welfare
And city of Thebes I hereby do report:

This man, Eteocles, is to enjoy
A public burial deep within the soil

Of his dear land for all the loyal deeds
He has performed. This soldier died in service
And never left his post before the gates.
Pure in the worship of his fathers' temples
And free from any other taint, he fell
Where it is fitting that the young should fall.

Thus was I ordered to proclaim in public
Touching Eteocles; but Polyneices,
His brother, this corpse here, is to be thrown
Beyond the boundary stones and left unburied—
A carcass for the mongrels to remove.
For he would have destroyed the land of Cadmus
If some divinity had not deployed
His brother's spear against him. He will own
The loathing of the gods, whom he dishonored
When he enlisted foreign enemies
To sack our city. It is only proper
That carrion-birds preside at his last rites,
And no grave digger ever lift a spade,
Nor mourner sing shrill dirges for his sake,
Nor kinsman lay his shiftless soul to rest.
So runs the mandate of the court of Thebes.

ANTIGONE:

But I contest the mandate of the court.
Even if no one dares to bury him
Beside me, I will do the deed myself,
All by myself; I fully accept the risk
Of burying my brother. Furthermore,
Not in the slightest do I fear the name
Of dissident. The womb that bore us both
Possesses a strange power—our common birth
From a cursed father and unlucky mother.

Therefore, O spirit of sisterly affection,
Take part in the misfortunes of a sibling,
Be vibrant for the dead and guard the interests
Of one who can express his will no longer.

So let the city mandate what it will,
No lean and hungry jackals will grow fat

From feeding on his flesh. I am a woman
But still shall find a way to lay this man
Within the earth and give him his last rites;
Even if I must tuck his due of dust 1035 (1039)
Within my dress's folds, I will inter him.
Again, let Thebes decree or not decree
Whatever it will—my will will find a way.

Herald:

I urge you not to disobey this law.

Antigone:

I urge you not to waste your time protesting. 1040

Herald:

Quick is the temper of people fresh from trouble.

Antigone:

Let it be quick; the man shall rest in earth.

Herald:

So you will grace this menace with a grave?

Antigone:

Yes, since the gods still champion his rights.

Herald:

They did, but only till he risked his home. 1045

Antigone:

He only brought revenge for those who wronged him.

Herald:

He fought against us all, not one man only.

Antigone:

The gods have spoken; Strife now holds the floor.
My brother shall be buried. Say no more.

Herald:

Go and be willful, knowing we forbid it. 1050 (1054)

CHORUS:
Astrophic

Long-roaring Furies, house-destroying Fates,
You have ripped up a family by the roots.
But what should I do? What can I allow?
The choice is mine. How can I neither grieve
For the disowned nor walk him to his grave?
Still, I am frightened. I cannot endure
The people's glare. Many of them will follow
Eteocles but who will mourn for you,
Unlucky soul? A weeping sister's solo
Threnody—who could think that this is fair?

The Chorus divides into two groups of six.

CHORUS 1:
Strophe A

No matter if the city outlaws due
Mourning for Polyneices—I, for one,
Will go with him and be his retinue.
For though what must and what must not be done
Change as the city changes, all of us
Are bound to sorrow for a prince's loss.

CHORUS 2:
Strophe B

We shall escort the other, since this is
The course both justice and the law approve.
Next to the blessed gods and mighty Zeus
Eteocles best kept the city safe.
When waves of strangers came to overwhelm
The ship of state, he stood fast at the helm.

Two pallbearers carry off the body of Polyneices, left, followed by Antigone and Chorus 1; the other two pallbearers carry off the body of Eteocles, right, followed by Ismene and Chorus 2.

Suppliants

Characters:

Chorus of Danaids (daughters of Danaus)
Danaus, brother of Aegyptus
Pelasgos, king of Pelasgia
Egyptian Sailors
Egyptian Herald
Handmaidens to the daughters of Danaus

Setting: *Within the dominions of King Pelasgos, between the city of Argos and the southern coast. A road on the left leads to the seashore. A road on the right leads to the city of Argos. An altar represents a* koinobōmia *(central shared altar of the gods), and around it lies a boundary distinguishing sacred space from profane. On the altar stand images of Zeus, Apollo, Poseidon, and Hermes, and several of their attributes are represented (for example, an eagle for Zeus, a trident for Poseidon). A twelve-member Chorus representing the fifty daughters of Danaus enters from the left, carrying suppliant boughs (leafy branches wreathed in wool). Their twelve Handmaidens enter along with them. Danaus enters last. While his daughters sing the opening ode, he examines the sacred area and eventually, after mounting the altar, looks right, down the road to Argos.*

Chorus:

Zeus, receiver of suppliant prayers,
Look favorably on us, a band
Of girls who sailed in terror from
The soft-shoaled delta of the Nile.
We have fled far and left behind
Divine lands flush with the frontiers
Of Syria. Convicts on the run,
Killers in exile—we have come
As none of these; no, we are fleeing
Husbands of our own free will.
Loathing Aegyptus and his spawn
We scorned their wicked marriage plot.

Danaus, our father, advocate,
And leader of our faction, seeing
The pieces on the game board set
Against our own, decided this was,
Of all our unappealing choices,
Most honorable: headlong flight
Over the breakers to a haven
In Argos—whence the gadfly-driven
Cow traveled wide until she met
Zeus's caress and panting breath
And calved our race.
For refugees
Armed only with a woolen wreath
Wrapped around a leafy bough,
Nothing could be more welcoming
Than an ancestral hearth:
O country,
City and translucent spring,
Olympians on high, and you
As deeply honored underneath
The earth, dwellers in grave and tomb;
Then, thirdly, Zeus the Savior, sentry
Before the uncorrupted home:

Accept this female company
Of suppliants; make sure the air
Is civil here; and please, before
The multitudinous, swarming, rash
Sons of Aegyptus dig their heels
Into the marshy shallows, dash
Their swift-oared vessel back to sea.
There let them meet with rain-soaked gales,
Thunderbolts, thunder, barbarous
Typhoons and cyclones. Let them die
Beneath the waves before they claim us,
Their own cousins, against our wills
And mount to marriage beds that Themis,
Goddess of justice, would despise.

Strophe A

I call a child from a far coast,
A sacred champion whom Zeus

Engendered with an ardent gust
Upon our foremost ancestress
When she browsed flowers in bovine form.
Fulfilled at long last, come to term,
She wisely gave the boy a name
True to the act from which he came:
Epaphos, for he was
"The Child of the Caress."

Antitrophe A

This champion I summon now.
Secondly I should call to mind
All that his mother, long ago,
Endured while grazing in this land.
If I can make our origins
Clear to the local citizens,
Facts they had never thought about
Will suddenly be brought to light,
And soon enough they all
Will own our chronicle.

Strophe B

If on a country road a traveler
Well versed in birdsong heard the echoes of
Our tremulous desperation, he would swear
He heard the voice of Tereus's wife,
The grief-racked, hawk-tormented nightingale
Whose anger served her ill.

Antistrophe B

Driven in exile from the leafy stands
Along the riverbank, she mourns her home
And tells a story: how her unkind hands
Savagely murdered her own son—his doom
A sacrifice to unmaternal rage,
The battle-ax's edge.

Strophe C

Like hers, this tearful strain
But in an Eastern scale
And channeling cheeks burnt brown

By hot days on the Nile.
It floods a heart untried
In weeping. I have gone
To gather the flowers of grief,
A long time wondering if
Some new friend will provide
Shelter to vagabonds
From the Mist-Shrouded Lands.

Antistrophe C

Ancestral deities,
Please heed our prayers and keep
A keen eye on your laws.
If you agree to stop
Marauders from achieving
Their goal of wantonness,
If you detest their lust,
You will at last prove just
To matrimony. Even
Deserters find your altars
Fortresses, sacred shelters.

Strophe D

May Zeus defend us; let his aid be clear
Because his deeds are difficult to track.
What even in the gloom shines everywhere
Strikes mortals merely as a stroke of luck.

Antistrophe D

Though every plan he favors with a nod
Falls feetfirst and perfected on its mark,
We only squint a short way up the road
Of his intentions, coiling in the dark.

Strophe E

He knocks man from a mountaintop,
From high hope to destruction,
Without picking a weapon up.
All deeds are easy for the gods.
Seated on his holy throne,

Zeus need but think an action,
And, on the instant, it is done.

Antistrophe E

Let him look down on human pride—
The old vine sprouts afresh,
Itching to take me as a bride.
Its reason works beyond dissuasion, 120 (106)
Like a switch for lashing cattle,
Implacable and rash;
A vain obsession turning fatal.

Strophe F

These are my sad, sharp, thick, tear-tumbling pangs.
I have been speaking of them, hurling them
All round the world in funerary songs.
I sing, alive, at my own requiem.

I beg you, ox-humped Apis, hear me, hear
And translate my barbaric tongue.
I cannot keep from ravaging
My muslin veil, my gorgeous veil from Tyre.

Antistrophe F

Those men's successful-seeming sacrilege
Remains yet vulnerable to the gods.
Let death hold off awhile. It's hard to gauge
Our woes, and who knows where this current leads? 135 (126)

I beg you, ox-humped Apis, hear me, hear
And translate my barbaric tongue.
I cannot keep from ravaging
My muslin veil, my gorgeous veil from Tyre.

Strophe G

Sweeping oar blades and a wooden house
Cross-stitched with linen to resist the brine
Conveyed us here. No sea storm troubled us;
The winds were kind. We've no cause to complain.
Now may the all-perceiving father find
Means to a favorable end

So that, unwedded, unsubdued,
Our reverend mother's mighty seed
Does not yield to the marriage bed.

Antistrophe G

May she who keeps her shrines impregnable,
Zeus's unsullied daughter, serve our cause
Willingly and in concord with our will.
All indignation at our fell pursuers,
May she, unbroken, come to the defense
Of us, the yet-unbroken ones,

So that, unwedded, unsubdued,
Our reverend mother's mighty seed
Does not yield to the marriage bed.

Strophe H

Otherwise girls made tawny for
The sunlight will descend,
With suppliant bough in hand,
To nether Zeus, whose open door
Hospitably receives the dead.
If you Olympian deities
Refuse to recognize our pleas,
Hope dangles from a noose instead.

Zeus, Io suffers hatred yet,
Hatred from heaven, an old debt.
I know the queen of heaven's will.
Stiff winds come first, and then the squall.

Antistrophe H

Will Zeus's name henceforth be slandered?
How could he disown
The heifer's only son,
The calf whom he himself engendered?
How could he turn his gaze away
From our appeals? However high
Above us, may he mercifully
Grant us an audience when we pray.

Zeus, Io suffers hatred yet,
Hatred from heaven, an old debt.
I know the queen of heaven's will. 180 (Refrain)
Stiff winds come first, and then the squall.

DANAUS, *standing atop the altar, looking down the road to Argos:*

Daughters, be prudent, as I was a prudent
And sturdy old sea captain when together
We made the crossing. I have charted out
The course of our land strategy as well; 185
And so, I urge you, etch these warnings deeply
Into the waxen tablets of your mind
And store them for safekeeping.
Already I see
Dust in the distance, the mute messenger
Of soldiers on the move, and one can hear 190
The unmistakable grate of axle in socket.
There is a company, all shields and spears,
Approaching—pounding hoof and whirling wheel.

Soon local princes, led on by their scouts,
Will be at hand to look us up and down. 195 (186)
Whether this be a peaceful show of arms
Or they have pricked their chargers onward, bent
On some bloodthirsty purpose, you had better
Run for the hilltop where the local gods
Have sectioned off a refuge with their shrines. 200
Safer than wall or tower is an altar,
Sure as a never-splintering shield. Go on,
Make haste, and in your left hands duly wave
These wool-wound boughs, symbols of Suppliant Zeus.

Always remember to address our hosts 205
As strangers without introduction should—
Humbly and clearly. Stress that, though in exile,
You are in no way tainted with the bloodguilt.
Make sure no brashness undercuts your tone.
Moderate your face and keep your gaze 210 (199)
tranquil and free of all impertinence.
Be neither rash nor sluggish in your speech—
The people here are easily offended.
Finally, be submissive. You have come

As strangers on the run and destitute.
Boldness of speech does not become the weak.

CHORUS:

Father, you speak wise words to prudent girls,
And I have locked them in my memory.

The Chorus approaches an image of Zeus.

May Zeus, our ancient father, look on us—

DANAUS:

Yes, let him cast a kind beam from his eye.

CHORUS:

I wish that I were sitting there beside you.

DANAUS:

No moping now; convert our plan to action.

CHORUS:

Pity us, Zeus; keep us from being ruined.

DANAUS:

What he but wishes is at once perfected.

CHORUS:

[Let skies be gloomy for our bridegrooms only.] 225 (212)

DANAUS, *pointing to the image of an eagle:*

Now call upon the bird special to Zeus—

CHORUS:

[To stop the hawk before it finds the dove.]

DANAUS, *pointing to an image of Apollo:*

Apollo, too, once cast away from heaven.

CHORUS:

We call on the salubrious god of day.
Knowing our fortunes, he might sympathize.

Danaus:

Sympathize, yes, and favor you with safety.

Chorus:

Which other of these gods should I invoke?

Danaus, *pointing to an image of Poseidon:*

I see the trident, emblem of its god.

Chorus:

Support us here as you did on the waves.

Danaus, *pointing to an image of Hermes:*

Here is the god the Greeks address as Hermes.

Chorus:

May he proclaim good tidings to the free.

Danaus:

Come, gather round the central altar, common
To all the guardian gods. Settle upon
The sanctuary like a flock of doves
Harried by hawks who come, despite their feathers (224)
And avian blood, to feed upon their kin
And taint the family. How can bird-on-bird
Murder be pure? How can a groom be pure
Who ravishes a shrinking kinswoman
Against her father's wishes? Such an outrage
Will never slip conviction and go free,
Not even down in Hades' halls.

The Chorus settles around the central altar.

Remember
All I have told you, answer as I taught you,
And victory will greet you in the end.

Pelasgos, the king of Argos, enters from the right in a horse-drawn chariot, attended by an armed retinue.

PELASGOS:

What shall we call a strange menagerie
Wrapped in exotic robes of thicker weave
Than we wear? No, no, certainly such costumes
Were never spun in Argos or in Greece.
How, without notice, sponsor, or guide, you dared
To slip into my realm frankly astounds me. 255 (240)

Still, those suppliant boughs laid out beside you
As offerings to our local gods are clear
Signs of asylum, and the only feature
We Greeks can recognize. As for the rest
Of your ensemble, I could guess forever,
If there were not your voice to make all clear.

CHORUS:

How right you are about our clothing! Yet,
Before I answer further, please inform me,
What is your title? Scepter-bearing priest,
Town-worthy, or commander of the land?

PELASGOS:

With perfect confidence you may address
Your answers and your inquiries to me.
Pelasgos is my name; as son and heir
To late Palaichthon the earthborn, I am
Sole ruler of this land. The inhabitants 270 (252)
Who reap the profit of my mother earth
Have gained my name thereby: Pelasgians.

All of the land, the sacred Strymon waters
Westward to the setting sun, I rule.
I bound the Perrhaebians, touch the wastes
Beyond the Pindus near Paeonia,
And reach the shoulders of montane Dodona.
Ocean's domain alone can give me borders,
And I hold sway over all within.

The plain on which we stand is Apia,
So named in honor of Apollo's son,
A seer and doctor, who resided here
After he left Naupactus-by-the-Sea.

You see, some time ago, earth festered with
The taint of unpurged murder and disgorged 285 (266)
A nest of serpents, vicious, venomous,
A plague upon the land. This Apis, though,
So cleansed us of the monstrous infestation,
So faultlessly with surgery and spell
Siphoned the bad blood off that to this day 290
The prayers of Argos celebrate his name.

Now that my rank and birth have been divulged,
Please state your pedigree and all things else
You deem essential. Bear in mind: we Argives
Have little patience for long-winded speech. 295

Chorus:

Our tale is quick and brief: we lay a claim to
Argive extraction, since we are the seed
Of the Prolific Cow, and I am ready
To verify this claim with evidence.

Pelasgos:

Ludicrous! that you foreigners descend 300 (277)
Somehow from Argive stock. You look more like
Libyan gypsies than our housewives here.
The Nile might breed complexions such as yours;
Or, rather, you could all have sat as models
For Kyprian Aphrodite, the likeness stamped 305
On lovely statuettes by oversexed
Fondlers of marble. I hear the Bedouin girls
Are dark as you, who, seated pillion
On camels, fancy they are riding horseback—
They live out there somewhere near Aethiopia. 310
Had you been armed with bow instead of bough,
I would have guessed you came as Amazons,
Ravenous, manless, to devour our flesh.

Teach me, so that I may more amply grasp,
How in the world you went about deriving 315 (289)
Your dusky branches from our Argive roots.

CHORUS:

Is there a legend that a girl named Io
Was once key-holder for your temple of Hera?

PELASGOS:

By all accounts she was; no one denies it.

CHORUS:

And Zeus seduced her, mortal though she was?

PELASGOS:

To Hera the affair was not clandestine.

CHORUS:

How did this royal entanglement unravel?

PELASGOS:

Our patron goddess made the girl a cow.

CHORUS:

But Zeus still wooed her, once she sprouted horns?

PELASGOS:

Yes, in the fashion of a rutting bull.

CHORUS:

How did his stubborn queen exact revenge?

PELASGOS:

She set a guardian, all eyes, upon her.

CHORUS:

Whom do you mean? What "all-observing" herdsman?

PELASGOS:

The earthborn Argus. Hermes struck him dead.

CHORUS:

How else did Hera torture the poor girl? (302)

Pelasgos:
A stinging fly, a cattle curse, to goad her.

Chorus:
Rivermen on the Nile pronounce it *gadfly*.

Pelasgos:
It drove her down a long road out of Greece.

Chorus:
Your story squares with ours in all respects.

Pelasgos:
First she arrived in Canopus, then Memphis.

Chorus:
And Zeus there made her pregnant with a touch.

Pelasgos:
Who boasts himself the offspring of this god?

Chorus:
Epaphos, the eponymous Caress.

Pelasgos:
Who was his child that named a continent?

Chorus:
Libya, harvest queen for half the world.

Pelasgos:
What other *produce* do you say she yielded?

Chorus:
Belus of the two sons, my father's father.

Pelasgos:
O speak your father's name, watchword for wisdom.

CHORUS:

Danaus sired us; his brother had fifty sons.

PELASGOS:

Now do not grudge to speak his name as well. 345 (322)

CHORUS:

Aegyptus. Now you know our lineage.
Since we are Argive, please provide us refuge.

PELASGOS:

I do believe you maidens have, by birth,
Just claim to be copartners in this land.
But how you strayed so far from your birthplace 350
Is quite beyond me. What misfortune struck?

CHORUS:

Dear King of the Pelasgians, the colors
Of woe are many. One could search worldwide
And never find two matching sets of plumage.
Who of you would have guessed that distant kin 355
Would sail out of the blue into this haven,
Running in terror of the marriage bed?

PELASGOS:

Why, though, do you entreat this group of gods
With fresh-cut, wool-wreathed branches in your hands?

CHORUS:

To fend off slavery to Aegyptus's sons. 360 (335)

PELASGOS:

You simply hate them, do you? Have they wronged you?

CHORUS:

What bride would dower a man of her own house?

PELASGOS:

That's a fine way for families to prosper.

Chorus:

Yes, and for men to jilt wives at their pleasure.

Pelasgos:

But how can I be pious in your cause?

Chorus:

Swear never to surrender us to our cousins.

Pelasgos:

Quite a demand—to promise a new war.

Chorus:

Justice will stand beside her champions.

Pelasgos:

If Justice has enlisted from the start.

Chorus:

Look at these wreaths, then, on the city's helm.

Pelasgos:

I tremble seeing your branches shade our altar.

Chorus:

Zeus of the Suppliants is harsh indeed.

Strophe A

King of Pelasgia, Palaichthon's heir,
Open your heart and listen. See me here
A suppliant, an exile, threatened like
A cow that wolves have trapped atop a peak.
Trusting her herdsman is on guard, she lows
Desperately to tell of her distress.

Pelasgos:

I see a congregation in the shade
Of fresh-cut boughs, strong-arming all the gods
Gathered around it. May you stranger-locals
Not devastate us with your troubles; may

No unforeseen and sudden strife befall
My city—she has no need of such things.

CHORUS:
Antistrophe A

May Suppliant Justice, daughter of Klarian Zeus,
See that our flight does not prove ruinous.
Though old and wise, let youth give you direction:
If you respect those who request protection
You will not want. The gods are bountiful
When they receive gifts from a stainless soul. 390 (364)

PELASGOS:

Do not imagine you have found a place
Around the hearth-fire in my private palace.
No, if the state is tainted as a whole,
The people, as a whole, prescribe the cure.
Without convening an assembly general,
I cannot guarantee your welcome here.

CHORUS:
Strophe B

You are the citizens, and you the city,
You the ungoverned legislative body
Ruling the sacred civic hearth. Your nod
Unanimously carries any motion.
Enthroned as scepter holder, you decide
Everything, so be careful of pollution.

PELASGOS:

May that pollution strike my enemies!
Still, though to help you would be risking harm,
Dishonoring your pious cries for help, 405 (378)
In turn, would be unwise. I am all doubt;
Misgivings seize my mind—whether to act
Or not to act and take what fortune gives.

CHORUS:
Antistrophe B

Look out for him who looks down from a height,
The guardian of much-tried souls who sit

As suppliants upon their neighbors' shrines
But fail to win the justice they are owed.
The wrath of Zeus, god of the lost, remains
Stubborn however much his victims plead.

Pelasgos:

But if the scions of Aegyptus claim
Custody over you as their close kin
By virtue of your laws, who would be willing
To challenge them? Your case—to wit, that they
Are *not* your legal masters—must be tried
According to the statutes of your homeland. 420 (391)

Chorus:
Strophe C

May I never in any way
Be subject to the power of males.
I would go join the stars to flee
The ill will in these nuptials.
Ally yourself with Righteousness.
Render the judgment god would choose.

Pelasgos:

No judgment is judicious in this matter.
Don't make me judge of it. As I have told you,
Even though I hold the power, I
Will take no action without public backing.
If trouble should ensue before I win it,
The people surely would accuse me, saying,
"By favoring strangers you have wrecked the state."

Chorus:
Antistrophe C

Balanced both ways, the kin god Zeus
Eyes our affairs, duly allotting 435 (403)
Misdeeds to the unscrupulous
And good deeds to the law-abiding.
If all deeds have their proper weight,
How could the right choice cause regret?

Pelasgos:

I must sink deep in thought to come up with
The safest course. I need a diver's eyes—
Sharp vision not fogged up by wine—to fathom
This matter to its bottom so that, first,
It proves by no means ruinous to the state
And then ends favorably for me as well:
Battle must take no spoils away from Argos.

Still, we must also be on guard or else,
By yielding you once you have found a place
Here in the home of gods, we may be left with
A bad tenant, an Unforgiving Grudge
Who never lets a man go free, not even
Dead and in Hades' house. Does it not seem
That thought is what we need to get us through?

Chorus:

Strophe D

Think, then, so long as you become
Our just and pious advocate.
Do not betray a castaway
Driven leagues and leagues from home
By an unholy threat.

Antistrophe D

Do not look on while I, as spoils,
Am snatched out of this sanctuary.
You are the power that matters here.
Check the excessive pride of males.
Steer clear of sacred fury.

Strophe E

Do not sit there, wide-eyed and idle,
While your charge is hauled
Down from the god she hangs upon,
While, spite of Justice, she is pulled—
A filly by the bridle,
A maiden by her gorgeous gown.

Antistrophe E

Know this for certain: what you choose
Today someday will fall
Upon your children and your house.
The balance will be paid in full.
Remember how far Zeus
Goes in supporting righteousness.

Pelasgos:

My contemplation now has sailed its course
And landed on this point: there is no way,
No way at all, to get around a war
Either with these gods here or those men coming.
The ship is soundly doweled and its cables
Are taut. It was drawn up on solid ground.
None of our outcomes will be free from pain.

You see, if goods are stolen from a house,
Zeus, god of wealth and chattel, can replace them
With goods that more than make up for the loss.
All stores can be restored. In just this manner
When a tongue has shot off insults, wounding
Arrows of anger at an awkward time,
Speech can appease the hurt that speech has caused.

However, to ensure that family murder
Does not afflict us, we can only offer
Victims beforehand, many sacrifices
To all the gods. From now on I shall stand
Distant and let the quarrel run its course.
If only I were a simpleton instead of
A seasoned statesman, maybe what's to come
Would seem less dire. Ah, well, despite my worries,
Everything still may turn out for the best.

Chorus:

Now hear our modest, ultimate proposal.

Pelasgos:

I am all ears; your words will not escape me.

Chorus:

We wear sashes and belts to cinch our gowns.

Pelasgos:

As is quite fitting for a woman's wardrobe.

Chorus:

Know that from these we make a rare device.

Pelasgos:

Go on and say what you can do with them.

Chorus:

If you should fail to speak the oath that saves us—

Pelasgos:

How will your sash contraption benefit you?

Chorus:

We shall adorn your gods with new tableaux.

Pelasgos:

Your words are riddling; bluntly state your purpose.

Chorus:

To hang directly from your gods—ourselves.

Pelasgos:

I grasp your meaning, and it whips my heart.

Chorus:

You know now; I have opened up your eyes.

Pelasgos:

Slippery business, hard to wrestle with
On every side. Evils are roiling round me
Like a river's rapids, like a sea
Of ruin, fathomless, impassable,
And I have dropped right in. Nowhere is there
A haven from the troubles seething round me.

If, on the one hand, I do not perform
This favor for you, you will spread pollution
Further than any archery could compass.
If, on the other hand, I stand my ground
Before the walls and try *your* case in battle
Against *your* kin, the offspring of Aegyptus,
How bitter will the losses be—the blood
Of *my* own soldiers thickening *my* soil, (476)
And all because of women? In the end, though,
One must rate the wrath of Zeus the Savior
Highest of all. Fear of him reigns supreme
Among us mortals.
Therefore, venerable
Father of this gaggle, gather up
Their branches like a bushel in your arms
And set them on the altar back in town.
That way, the citizens will never doubt
You come in peace, and, maybe, after all,
No civic backlash will abuse my name—
People are fond of blaming those in charge.
Right at the start some few will pity you
And feel a righteous indignation rising
Against that reckless gang of grooms, and soon
The people all will champion your cause. (488)
Everyone loves to root for underdogs.

Danaus:

Having a courteous, well-meaning sponsor
Is of the highest value to us. But could you
Please send some soldiers and a guide along
To help me find the temple-fronting altars
Of the divinities who guard the city?
They also would protect me on the road.
You see, our clothes and coloring are different.
Nile and Inachus breed distinct complexions.
One should be careful: overboldness often
Results in fear, and time and time again
A man has killed his kin through ignorance.

PELASGOS:

The man speaks with a purpose. All you soldiers,
Escort him to the town-shrines where the gods
Are settled. But remember: you are guiding 555 (502)
A guest to shelter at a sacred hearth—
Don't stop to gossip with the passersby.

Several members of Pelasgos's retinue escort Danaus off to Argos, right.

CHORUS:

You gave commands to him and off he went
About his task. But what am I to do?
How will you hearten me to face the future? 560

PELASGOS:

Put down those boughs, emblems of your distress.

CHORUS:

There I have left them, heeding your instructions.

PELASGOS:

Proceed down to this clearing here below.

CHORUS:

What safety can unhallowed ground provide?

PELASGOS:

We won't just toss you to the craws of vultures. 565

CHORUS:

What if we fear men more malign than vipers?

PELASGOS:

Please answer happy speech with happy speech.

CHORUS:

It's hardly strange that fear has gripped my mind.

PELASGOS:

Yes, needless terror is a female weakness.

Chorus:

Well, you should frame your words and deeds to calm us. 570 (515)

Pelasgos:

It's only a short time that you will be left
Without a father. I must now go call
The citizens to council. Once my words
Have put them in the proper mindset, I
Shall teach your father how to win them over. 575

To that end, stay here and beg our gods
To grant what you desire. I am off
To turn my plan to action. May persuasion
And lucky outcome march beside me now!

Pelasgos exits right, with chariots and the remainder of his retinue.

Chorus:

Strophe A

O king of kings, most blessed of the blessed, 580
O great god of success, Prosperous Zeus,
Further the interests of your kin—detest
The hubris of these men. Come rescue us
By scuppering black-beamed catastrophe.
Drown their troopships in the mauve-waved sea. 585 (530)

Antistrophe A

Look kindly on a wholly female cause
And lend weight to the legend of the favor
You showed, in years past, to our ancestress,
The woman you adored. Old Io's lover,
Remember that we sprang out of your seed, 590
Out of a girl who roamed the countryside.

Strophe B

I trace my line back to these pastures where
A sentry watched my mother browse the flowers.
A fly, then, stinging madness into her,
She ran and ran 595
Through many tribes of men
And, in accordance with her fate,

Cleaved the waves and named a strait—
The Bosporus between opposing shores.

Antistrophe B

Then on to Asia: Phrygia rich in flocks, 600 (547)
Teuthras (which is the leading Mysian city),
Lydian valleys and Cilician peaks.
Then, speeding through
Farther Pampylia
(The deep, voluptuous pastures and 605
The rivers running all year round),
She reached the grain-famed land of Aphrodite.

Strophe C

Pricked farther by the wingèd cowherd's sting,
She came to a divine, life-lush oasis,
A snow-fed meadow. (Mighty Nile 610
Fills it with waters free from all diseases—
Typhon's plagues.) But Hera's maenad still,
She was all frenzy, raging at the wrong
She suffered—constant prodlike needling.

Antistrophe C

The aboriginals who dared approach 615 (565)
Turned green with fright, eyeing a strange subhuman
Creature. Their hearts jumped; they were horrified:
Half features of a cow, half of a woman—
It baffled them. Who was it, then, that laid
His hands on her? Who calmed her with a touch? 620
Whose unguent soothed the gadfly-goaded itch?

Strophe D

The king it was, who rules outside of time.
Under his deft, effortless lust of limb,
Under his holy breath, she changed; her eyes
Were free to weep away the long disgrace. 625
Filled with a freight that truly can be called
A gift from Zeus, she bore a flawless child

Antistrophe D

Predestined to perpetual increase.
The whole land cried, "It only could be Zeus,

The great life-spring, that sired such a boy!" 630 (585)
What god else could have seen through Hera's ploy?
Zeus did. Say, then, that we originate
From Epaphos, and you will speak aright.

Strophe E

What god more given to the greatest good
Could I more fittingly invoke? 635
He is the King, the hand that sowed our seed
And laid the groundwork of our stock.
He is an all-resourceful mind.
Zeus, like a welcome wind.

Antistrophe E

Never subjected to outside demands 640
Or weaker than some stronger lord,
He holds no higher throne in reverence.
His act as rapid as his word,
What in the wide world could he not
Accomplish with a thought? 645 (599)

Danaus enters, right, alone.

Danaus:

Children, take heart. All's well among the natives.
Executive decrees have passed the assembly.

Chorus:

Greetings, old father, most dear messenger
Of precious news. Please tell what sort of law
The councilmen have passed and how so many 650
Official hands rose in support of us.

Danaus:

The Argives passed the mandates without cavil
Or quibble and in so vigorous a manner
As to rejuvenate my dying hopes.
A show of hands unanimous, a forest 655
Bristling in air, has ratified as law—

First, that we live as foreign nationals
In this free country, safe from extradition

And deportation; second, that no body,
Local or foreign, may enslave our persons;
Third, that if there is need for a militia
Any citizen who stands aside
Will be, by public ban, expatriated.

Thus did the king of the Pelasgians
Direct them, arguing on our behalf
How massive is the wrath of Zeus,
god of the lost, and how it would fall hard
Upon the state in times to come. He added
That blood pollution multiplied by two—
That is, guest-killing joined with citizen-slaughter—
Would breed afflictions proof against all cure.

Hearing this speech, the councilmen assented
Even before the crier had time to read
The bill aloud. The obedient people
Heeded their master, answered to the reins,
And Zeus, too, clearly backs our interests.

Chorus:
Astrophic

Come, let us give the Argive folk
Blessings in song to counterpoise
The blessings they have given us.
Since, with our foreign lips, we speak
Strange words, we ask that guest-friend Zeus
Make sure we suffer no rebuke.

Strophe A

O Zeus-begotten deities, come listen
As we decant thanksgiving for our kinsmen.

May Ares, glutton for the battle-cry
And reaper of men on fields that we intend
For bounty, never leave Pelasgia
A charred and smoldering wasteland—

Because our family pitied us.
Without dissent they have upheld
The rights of suppliants of Zeus,
The sad sheep in the fold.

Antistrophe A

They never called our worries feminine
Excess or warped their votes to favor men.

They heeded Zeus's ever-watchful grudge,
A dynamo impossible to fight.
What house would want it perched up in the thatch?
It crashes down with such great weight.

Because they honored us, their kin,
As suppliants of holy Zeus,
Their altars henceforth will remain
Taintless when they make sacrifice.

Strophe B

From lips dappled with shade
Let loud beatitude
And praise-rapt prayer arise.
I pray that no disease
Depopulate these streets;
I pray that no disputes
Kill soldiers, strew their blood
Throughout the countryside—
Thus will the flower of youth
Always escape the scythe.

May Aphrodite's lover,
Man-slaying Ares, never
Shear the populace's
Pride, the finest fleeces.

Antistrophe B

May all the local elders
Heap the sacred altars
With gifts that prove this land
Is piously maintained.
May the whole populace
Venerate mighty Zeus
In many ways but most
As god of guest and host.
He trues our destinies
By heeding the old ways.

Artemis-Hecate,
Come safeguard pregnancy,
So that, in future years,
Fresh stewardship appears.

Strophe C

Let man-ravaging Frenzy never run
Rampant through this town,
Arming the grief-begetting god of war,
The foe of dance and lyre,
Until the city
Destroys itself. 735 (682)

May bevies of diseases throng
Far from the civic body
And the power of the wolf
Prove gentle to the young.

Antistrophe C

Let Zeus in every season foster flawless fruit
And the best stock beget
Many additions to drove, herd, and flock.
Let all the local folk
Amply enjoy
The gods' largess

As bards before the shrines chant songs
Lauding prosperity,
From uncorrupted lips one voice
In tune with fingered strings. 750 (697)

Strophe D

May common good, guiding the city
With prudent, public-minded skill,
Protect the people's interests well
And always offer a foreign body
Fair and painless terms before
Girding the god of war.

Antistrophe D

Let all who dwell in town and field
Fell bulls and carry laurel boughs

In honor of their deities,
For reverend Justice has enrolled
Third in her litany of laws:
Honor progenitors.

Danaus:

I praise your prayers; they were in perfect taste.
Now please do not start trembling when I tell you
Of shocking news out of the blue. From off
Our rock of supplication I descry
A ship. The markings are distinctive: pennants
Along the mainsail; nets of girding ropes;
A prow with eyes scanning the harbor, heeding
All too well the steersman's helm abaft.
Unfriendly omens, all. The men on board
Are vivid—swarthy limbs and muslin gowns.
Crisp in the distance, an armada sits,
The troopships and the freighters, while the scout
Sweeps closer to the coastline with trimmed sails
And all hands at the oars.
Be brave and face
Their coming in a calm, disciplined manner.
Do not forget the gods. I will return
With troops and sympathizers soon. It's likely
Some lackey or spokesman for the enemy
Will stop here first and try to touch you, take you
As spoils of war. There will be none of that,
So never fear. All the same, just in case
My summons only slowly finds assistance,
You had better not forget the shelter
Afforded by that hilltop shrine. Take heart:
Sooner or later, on a certain date,
The man who scorns the gods must pay the price.

Chorus:

Father, I am afraid. The swift-winged ships
Have made the crossing. It will not be long.

Strophe A

Anxieties have ringed me round
And taken hold. Father, what good

Was our long journey to this land?
We only found more dread.

DANAUS:

Children, have faith. The Argive vote stands fixed.
Their army, rest assured, will fight to save you.

CHORUS:

You know Aegyptus's sons as well as I—
How brash and rude they are, how mad for war.

Strophe B

Sable eyes on sturdy planks,
Their ships have sped across the ocean
Laden with swarthy ranks on ranks
Of furious aggression.

DANAUS:

But here, my dears, they will encounter soldiers
Hide-bound, thick-skinned, and hardened in the sun.

CHORUS:

Do not abandon me. A woman is nothing
When left alone. The Ares isn't in her.

Strophe B

Bloody of heart and sly of thought,
Their guts eaten away by rot,
Like ravens, they will hardly worry
About the laws of sanctuary.

DANAUS:

Were they to make the gods their enemies,
Dear children, all would turn out well for us.

CHORUS:

Father, no reverence for tridents, no
Respect for gods will keep their hands away.

Antistrophe B

Madmen spurred by filthy passions
Do anything for their ambitions.

Oblivious to higher powers,
They lack all shame like mongrel curs.

Danaus:

The wolves here overpower the dogs, they say.
There's greater strength in barley than papyrus.

Chorus:

Theirs are the lusts of rabid, godless monsters!
We must do all we can to stop the onslaught.

Danaus:

Rigging armadas for departure takes
A tedious lot of time; just so, the mooring
Drags on and on until all lines and cables (766)
Are fast ashore; then, safe at anchor, still
No herdsman of the helm can rest at leisure,
Especially with evening fast descending
Upon a coast without a proper harbor.
Furthermore, getting soldiers down the gangway
Can be a little slippery if the ship
Rocks in its moorings.
Frightened as you are,
Do not neglect the wooden gods before you.
Though there are miles between us and the Argives
I will be back with help before you know it.
I trust the city will not disregard
A messenger whose gait shuffles with age,
So long as he is spry of thought and tongue.

Danaus puffs off toward Argos, right.

Chorus:
Strophe A

O hilly landscape, rightful object of
Our worship, what will happen to us now? (777)
Where can we run to? Where in Apia
Is there a hiding place obscure enough?

If only I, as black smoke spiraling,
Could join Zeus in the clouds; if, without wing,
A weightless body in the atmosphere,
I could disintegrate like dust in air.

Antistrophe A

Disaster is at hand; there's no escape.
The worries in my breast quiver and shake;
The flesh around my heart is turning black.
My father's sanctuary proved a trap.

I am all dread and swear a plaited noose
Will squeeze me, sate me with a taut release
Before some loathsome groom fingers my skin.
Let me, in death, take Hades for a man.

Strophe B

Where can I find a lone seat in the sky (792)
Up where the moist clouds gather into snow,
A peak no boots have trampled, slippery
And ominous, a place where no goats go—

Only my witnesses, the vultures, eyeing
My fall. I never will succumb
To nuptial torture, that rough way of dying.
My heart is set against that doom.

Antistrophe B

Thereafter, I would not refuse to be
A dinner spread for wild dogs, a feast
Laid out for carrion birds. The dead are free
From wrongs that cry out, keen to be redressed.

Death, come carry me away before
Life in a groom's bed is upon me.
What other freedom can I carve, what door,
To keep me safe from matrimony? (807)

Strophe C

Sisters, project wryneck laments
Up to the gods and goddesses.
But what end will attend our prayer?
Father, look kindly on our cause
But give their pride the searing glare
That it deserves. Almighty Zeus,
Earth ruler, save your suppliants.

Antistrophe C

The offspring of Aegyptus go
Too far in their wantonness.
We fled, and they pursued. Their violence—
How ruthlessly it harries us.
Yours is the fulcrum of the balance.
What in our mortal destinies
Could find due measure without you?

A band of Egyptian Sailors enters from the road from the coast, left, along with a Herald sent by the sons of Aegyptus.

Astrophic

Egyptian Sailors:

Yo, ho, ho, and yay, hey, hey, 885 (825)
We snatch our fill by land and sea.

Chorus:

Run, girls, for safety to the shrine—
Hard-hearted and amphibious
Beasts have arrived to sate their lusts.
Lord of the land, come rescue us.

Egyptian Sailors:

Hurry, girls, hurry to the hold
Fast as your feet can carry you.
Or do you want your tresses pulled,
Braids wrenched, and hands and feet run through?
Would you prefer to have your necks
Bloody dismasted by an ax?
Go, with a sailor's blessing, go!

Strophe A

Chorus:

If only ocean's whirlpools
Had broken up your bolt-bound hulls,
And you and your grotesquely proud 900 (845)
Masters had all gone down and died.

Egyptian Sailors:

You will be bruised inside and out
If I must lade you. Hush those cries!
That shrieking—like an ear disease.
Give up the shrine, now; mount the boat.
You girls enjoy no freedoms in
The cities of god-fearing men.

Antistrophe A
Chorus:

Kept forever from the pools
That put such vigor in our bulls,
May you run empty of the blood
That generates life-giving seed.

Egyptian Sailors:

We all are old campaigners, fierce,
Deep lunged, and with a potent grip.
You must embark upon our ship
Whether you will or no. Much force
Compels it. There's no hope for you
Deep-breasted wretches. Go on, go!

Chorus:
Strophe B

I wish you were the helpless one
Foundering in a salt-sea grove.
If only Syrian winds had swamped you off
The sand-heaped grave of Sarpedon.

Egyptian Sailors:

Quick, to the twice-curved freighter. Look alive!
Don't drag your feet now, girls—
My snatchers love to tug at pretty curls.

Chorus:
Antistrophe B

I wish you were an underground
Dead menace. Here you bloom with pride.
May Doom, the great death power, take our side
And stop the outrage you intend.

Egyptian Sailors:

Go on, now, shriek and bark and whine to gods.
You won't jump out of the Egyptian ship. 930 (873)
You soon will voice more bitter dirges yet.

Chorus:
Strophe C

Father Zeus, your images
Have failed to give me shelter. Like
A creeping spider, a nightmare,
He drags me toward the shore. 935

O Earth, then, Earth, drive back
This terrible trespass.
O son of Earth, O Zeus.

Herald:

The local gods don't scare me, since they neither
Reared my childhood nor will ease my age. 940

Chorus:
Antistrophe C

Right here beside me, spit and hiss—
Upright but with a viper's look,
What creature is this? Agony
Has laid its hands on me.

O Earth, then, Earth, drive back 945 (900)
This terrible trespass.
O son of Earth, O Zeus.

Herald:

Accept your fate on board the ship or else
These hands will shred your fine gowns without mercy.

Chorus:

Good city-leaders, I am overpowered! 950

Herald:

It looks like I will have to pull your hair, then,
Since you just won't listen well enough.

Chorus:

We are undone, king. We are suffering horrors!

Herald:

You will see your kings—Aegyptus's sons—
Quite soon. Cheer up, you will be all subjection.

The Herald crosses the sacred boundary and reaches out to grab a daughter of Danaus. Pelasgos enters, right, in the nick of time, again accompanied with three chariots and a retinue.

Pelasgos:

You there, what are you doing? What presumption
Guided you here to desecrate the land
Of the Pelasgians? What, did you think
You'd reached a state composed of women only?
You, barbarian, have gone too far
And stung the pride of Greeks. Your purpose veered
Wide of the mark and wholly missed the target.

Herald:

How have I shot beyond the bounds of justice?

Pelasgos:

First, you do not grasp how a guest should act.

Herald:

How so? I only came to claim lost goods.

Pelasgos:

What local sponsor has approved your suit?

Herald:

Hermes the Finder, greatest patron of all.

Pelasgos:

You talk of gods while desecrating them.

Herald:

I honor gods—my native gods of Nile.

PELASGOS:

Ours, then, are nothing, if I hear you right.

HERALD:

The girls are mine, if no one calls them freeborn.

PELASGOS:

Howls will be yours, and soon, if you but touch them.

HERALD:

I catch your drift—it's inhospitable.

PELASGOS:

To temple thieves I can be rather rude.

HERALD:

Well, there's your message to Aegyptus's sons. (928)

PELASGOS:

That threat does not weigh heavy on my mind.

HERALD:

Well (and I only ask you this to give them
A full report, as is a herald's duty),
Who shall I say has robbed them of these women,
Their cousins, and on whose authority?

Ares resolves disputes like this and not
By listening to witnesses in court.
Trust me, he never uses sums of silver
To settle a dispute. No, there are many
Tumblings of soldiers to the dust instead,
Many convulsive kicks as life departs.

PELASGOS:

Why should I tell you what my name is? Soon
You and your friends will know it all too well.
Here are the terms: you may remove these girls
Only if you persuade them in good faith (941)
And they as willingly concede. A law
Has passed without dissent in the assembly

Banning surrender of these girls by force.
A hammer drove a nail through the decision
So that it would stay fixed. Although the words
Were never chiseled into stone or sealed
On spooled sheets of papyrus, you have read them
Here from the tongue and lips of a free man.
Fast as you can, now, scuttle from my sight.

HERALD:

So this tastes sweet to you—provoking war.
May victory and conquest greet the males!

The Herald strides off, left, followed by the band of Egyptian Sailors.

PELASGOS, *speaking to the Herald's back:*

O, you will find my townsfolk men indeed—
They gulp the bloodred wine instead of tippling
Your yellow barley juice.

To the Danaids (and their Handmaidens).

Now, all of you,
Cheer up and with this loyal retinue
March toward a city made impregnable
By lofty walls and towers. There is a range
Of public housing there: you could reside
In comfortable rooms among the locals
Or, if you wish, in chambers set apart.
My palace, too, is quite accommodating.
Select whichever residence seems proper
And suits your needs. I am your patron here,
As are the people who proposed and passed
The state-decree. What are you waiting for?
Some more official welcome to our town?

CHORUS:
Astrophic

King of Pelasgia, may you
Blossom with blessings in return
For those you have bestowed on us.
But please go call our father Danaus,
Our king of counsel, our brave guide.

He has the prudence to discern
The proper course and will decide
What rooms are best adapted to
Establishing our reputation,
So that the natives never speak
Of us in scorn or anger. Even
When governments are welcoming,
Their citizens are always quick
To find fault with a foreign tongue.
It all may turn out in the end.

Pelasgos exits with his chariots and retinue, right.

You maids there, dowries we were given
To serve us well, come gather round,
Each girl at the defensive station
Danaus prudently assigned. (979)

Danaus enters with an armed retinue, right.

Danaus:

Come, daughters, we must offer prayers, slaughter
Cattle and wet the altars for the Argives
As if they were the gods upon Olympus.
There is no doubt that it was they who saved us.
Soon as they heard my news, they were all kindness
To us (their kin), and rancor for your cousins.
They even gave me soldiers as attendants
To serve as fitting emblems of my rank
And keep watch so that I do not encounter,
In sudden ambush, death by dint of spears
And drop an endless burden on the land.
Beholden unto them for these benefits,
We owe them, from the bottom of our hearts,
Respect and gratitude.
Next order of business:
Add this further maxim to the tablets (993)
Of my improving sayings: "Time alone
Approves new peoples." Since the locals always
Are eager to attaint an immigrant,
And slurs are swiftly on the wing, I urge you
Not to disgrace me now that you have reached

The buxom age that turns the heads of men.
A ripe fruit is by no means easy to protect.
Animals, humans—both love to devour it,
Isn't it so? All beasts with wings to flutter
Or feet to slink on fail to fight off hunger
When Kypris plumps a rind with succulence.
Likewise the rondure of a luscious maiden—
Every passerby concedes desire
And shoots forth groping arrows from his eyes.
Therefore, make sure that we do not endure
Here what we sailed through so much toil and ocean
To escape. Our actions must result in
No dishonor for ourselves, no joy
For enemies.
Here are two kinds of housing:
Pelasgos offers one; the city, another.
Each is free, and either acceptable
So long as you remember my commandments
And prize your honor more than life itself.

CHORUS:

May the Olympian gods control our fortunes
In all things else. As for our fruit, have faith,
Dear father. Barring strange commands from heaven,
I shall not stray from my wonted path.

CHORUS:

Strophe A

March for the city now, extolling all its deities—
All of the blessed urban powers
And all the spirits on the shores
Of venerable Erasinos.

Join the ovation, maids. Let praise possess Pelasgia.
We shall no longer hold the delta of the Nile in awe

Antistrophe A

But hail the tranquil, child-rich rivers watering this soil.
They offer up salubrious cups
While softly nourishing the crops
With streams as sleek as rubbing oil.

Pure Artemis, look kindly on us, never let duress
Force us to Kytherea's goal. Let Hades claim that prize.

HANDMAIDENS:
Strophe B

Never neglect the goddess Kypris—this is sage advice. 1090
In power she is ranked with Hera, second after Zeus.
We must revere her, queen of wiles,
For all her stunning miracles.

Flanked by Lust and sweet Persuasion
(Who knows just how to win a lover), 1095 (1040)
Her children and her confidants,
She walks abroad presiding over
The little love gods' lisps and haunts
And peaceful Consummation.

Antistrophe B

But I am worried for you fugitives. I prophesy 1100
Red wars and horrid woes—stiff punishment is on the way.
Why else did their swift persecution
So effortlessly cross the ocean?

What we are counseling is common
Knowledge: *fate will come to pass.* 1105
No one will ever get around
The unrevealing mind of Zeus.
Take heart: what's coming in the end
Is known to many women.

Strophe C
CHORUS:

Mighty Zeus, defend us from 1110 (1052)
Wedlock to Aegyptus's spawn.

HANDMAIDENS:

That outcome would be better, but—

CHORUS:

You are about to touch on what
Counsel should never touch upon.

HANDMAIDENS:

Can *you* divine what is to come?

Antistrophe C

CHORUS:

How could I know what god's thoughts are?
How scan a fathomless abyss?

HANDMAIDENS:

Pare your prayers; make them less deep-reaching.

CHORUS:

These lessons you have started teaching—
Will they ring true as sound advice?

HANDMAIDENS:

Yes, never press the gods too far.

CHORUS:

Strophe D

May Lord Zeus deprive us of
A hateful marriage to our foes.
He granted Io sweet release
From sufferings. His force was kind;
The domineering hand
That made her whole was love.

Antistrophe D

So long as women win the day,
I'd take two thirds of happiness or,
Out of competing woes, the lesser.
May Justice, just as we have prayed,
Take justice for a guide.
Let god's plan set us free.

The Chorus of Danaids march off toward Argos, flanked by their Handmaidens and followed by Danaus and his retinue.

Notes

Persians

4 "Gold-glittering" (the compound adjective *poly-chrys-* in the Greek) recurs in lines 11 and 47.

5–7 Dareius the Great ruled the Persian Empire from 522 BC to October of 485 BC; his son Xerxes the Great ruled from October of 485 BC to 465 BC.

20–62 This is the first of three litanies of names; compare lines 318–48 and 1021–59. Artaphernes (24) was Xerxes' cousin and satrap of Lydia at the time of invasion. His father is mentioned at 845 and 848. Some few other names may have been recognizable to Aeschylus's original audience, but most of them, even if not made up out of whole cloth, were included primarily for their exotic sound.

20–21 Susa was the capital of the Persian Empire, and Ecbatana (modern-day Hamadan) was the capital of the former empire of the Medes. Kissia was the region in which Susa was located (Herodotus *Histories* 5.49).

39 "Memphis" was the Greek name for Ineb Hedj, an administrative capital in lower Egypt.

41 "Thebes the Elder" is the Greek name for Egyptian Thebes. The Egyptians called the city Niwt-Imn. It is located on the east bank of the Nile about six hundred miles south of the Mediterranean Sea.

42–44 Herodotus (*Histories* 7.79) attests that the Egyptians served under Artaphernes and contributed two hundred ships to the Persian armada. The "marsh people" of the Nile Delta were renowned for fierceness (Thucydides *History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.110).

45 The Lydians served under their satrap Artaphernes (Herodotus *Histories* 7.74); see the note on lines 20–62.

51–53 Two horses were yoked to each pole, so "twin-" and "triple-poled" chariots were drawn by four and six horses, respectively.

56 Tmolus (modern-day Bozdağ) stood in Lydia (modern-day Turkey), with Sardis at its foot. As a mountain god, Tmolus judges the music contest between Pan and Apollo (Ovid *Metamorphoses* 11.168).

57 The Mysians inhabited northwestern Asia Minor. They also served under Artaphernes (Herodotus *Histories* 7.74); see the notes on lines 20–62, 20–21, 45.

59 Located eighty-five miles south of modern Baghdad, Babylon was a Mesopotamian city-state that was founded in roughly 3000 BC and is regarded as the earliest civilization. Cyrus the Great added the city to the Persian Empire in 539, and it was an administrative capital of the Persian Empire at the time of the play's dramatic setting.

74–79 The Hellespont (modern-day Dardanelles) is a strait separating the Balkans (Europe) from Anatolia (Asia). It takes its name from a character in Greek mythology, Helle (the daughter of Athamas), who falls off a golden flying ram and lands in the

strait. The chorus refers here to the second bridge that Xerxes had built after the first was destroyed by a storm (Herodotus *Histories* 7.36).

86–87 These lines may refer to the traditional Greek derivation of the name "Persians" from the hero Perseus (Herodotus *Histories* 7.61.3, 7.150.2; Sommerstein 2008, 22n14). In myth, Zeus assumes the form of a shower of gold to impregnate Perseus's mother, Danaë.

88–93 Assyria was a Persian province comprising modern-day Syria, northern Iraq, and southeastern Turkey. This strophe resembles a prophecy said to have been delivered to the Athenians at Delphi in 480 BC: "eager Ares driving his Assyrian-made chariot hurls everything to ruin" (Herodotus *Histories* 7.140).

126 "The walls of Kissia" here refers to the walls of Susa; see the note on lines 20–21.

153 "Xerxes' royal mother" is Atossa, the widow first of Cambyses (529–522 BC) and then of Dareius, to whom she bore four sons, including Xerxes. Born ca. 550, she would have been around seventy when the battle of Salamis occurred. As she is never named in the play and the manuscripts call her only the "queen," I have left her character anonymous.

156 "I bow down humbly to the floor": Whereas the Asiatic peoples prostrated themselves before their kings, whom they considered to be gods, the Greeks regarded this act of *proskynesis* (fawning) to a mortal as repugnant. The campaigns of Alexander the Great are interesting in this regard: in order to behave convincingly as king to the Asiatic peoples that he conquered, he eventually required *proskynesis* to himself as a god—a decision that his Greek soldiers resented. The chorus emphasizes the divinity of Persian kings in lines 160–61.

182 The Ionian Greeks were those who inhabited colonies on the western coast of Asia Minor. The queen here mistakenly uses their name to refer to the mainland Greeks. This error on her part anticipates her ignorance of Athens and of Greece at lines 242–57. The chorus and Xerxes also refer to the Greeks in general as "Ionians" (607, 1015).

192 "Doric skirt": Thucydides explains that the (Dorian) Spartans were the first to introduce "the moderate mode of dress" that came to be prevalent in Greece (*History* 1.6).

211–14 The queen washes so that she will be ritually clean when she pours the offerings to the "talismanic gods." It is not clear which divinities she means here. In Greek religion there was an emphatic distinction between the Olympian gods (whom the Persians, for the purposes of the play, worship like the Greeks) and the chthonic deities. One gave burnt offerings to the former, so that the smoke would rise up to them, and poured liquid offerings to the latter, so that the liquids would seep into the earth. Thus, the chorus advises the queen to pour offerings to "the Earth and Dear Departed" (including Dareius) at lines 231–32. She describes these offerings in detail (665–77) and pours them after line 681.

248 The chorus here refers to the battle of Marathon (490 BC), in which the Athenians and their allies the Plataians charged and routed the Persian troops sent by Dareius and drove them back to their ships and out to sea.

250 "Fountainheads of silver" refers to the mines of Laurion at the southern tip of Attica.

Worked heavily by slave labor throughout the fifth century BC, they were a major source of revenue for Athens.

256 See the note on line 248.

284 "Salamis": This is the first mention of the island that gives its name to the battle described in detail at lines 376–463. Lying about one nautical mile west of the port of Athens at Piraeus, it is the largest island in the Saronic Gulf.

318–48 For the list of names, see the note on lines 20–62.

321 Scholia (emended by Hesychius) identify Sileniai as a headland on Salamis near "Cape Victory" (probably along the Cynosura peninsula on the eastern side of the island) (Sommerstein 2008, 50n53).

322 "Chiliarch" means "leader of a thousand men." The Persian army was organized in multiples of ten (Herodotus *Histories* 7.81).

324 The Bactrians "lived in the basin of the Upper Oxus; their capital was the modern Baklh" (How and Wells 1912, 284).

325 The "Isle of Aias" is poetic periphrasis for Salamis, which was settled by the Homeric hero Telamonian Aias.

332–34 Chrysa here is most likely the city in the Troad (northeastern Asia Minor). I depart from the text of West here and follow the manuscripts in making Matallus's career include both infantry and cavalry service.

336 The Magians were a priestly caste within Zoroastrianism who were authoritative on religious doctrine. See Herodotus *Histories* 1.132 and Xenophon *Cyropaideia* 8.3.11.

338 For the Bactrians, see the note on line 324.

344 "Lerneian" here probably refers to the city Lerna (also called Lyrnessos) in the Troad (Sommerstein 2008, 53n59). Achilles captures his concubine Briseïs there (Homer *Iliad* 19.291–300).

346 North and east of Cyprus, Cilicia extended inward from the southern and eastern coasts of Asia Minor. A vassal kingdom in the Persian Empire, it was allowed to retain its own kings, many of whom were named Synnesis (Olmstead 1948, 39).

360–65 Herodotus reckons the number of Greek ships was 385, 180 of which were Athenian (*Histories* 8.43–48). He most likely uses this passage as his source for the number of Persian ships. He puts the total at 1,207 (regarding the number of elite ships, 207, as distinct from, rather than part of, the 1,000) (7.89.1, 184.1).

393 For "Isle of Aias," see the note on line 325.

478–80 The small island here is Psytalleia, between Salamis and Piraeus. A contingent of Persians was stationed here before the battle (Herodotus *Histories* 8.76). A band of Greeks under Aristides subsequently wiped them out, and Aeschylus may have been among this "cleanup" party.

515–45 The soldiers' retreat from Boeotia in central Greece through Thessaly, Macedonia, and Thrace (northeastern Greece) and back to Asia is geographically accurate. Phocis is a region northwest of Boeotia, and Mount Parnassus stands between them. Doris, in turn, is northwest of Phocis, between Mount Oeta and Mount Parnassus. The Sperchios River flows east from its source at Mount Tymfristos in the Pindus moun-

tain range and empties into the Malian Gulf, which cuts west into Greece from the Aegean. "Achaia" here refers to Achaia Pthiotis, on the north side of the gulf. Magnesia is in northeastern Thessaly, around the Pagasetic Gulf and along the Aegean. The Axios (modern-day Vardar) passes east through Macedonia and empties into the Aegean. The Strymon River enters Greece through modern-day Bulgaria and empties into the gulf that bears its name. Lake Bolbe (modern-day Volvi), by means of a stream, empties into this gulf. Aeschylus refers to this region northeast of the Chersonese near Mount Pangaion (6,417 feet) as Edonia.

607 For "Ionians," see the note on line 182.

614 The "Kychreian coast" is the shore of Salamis. The adjective comes from Kychreus, a mythic hero and king of the island. Pausanias reports that, according to legend, Kychreus appeared to the Greek soldiers in the form of a snake during the battle (*Description of Greece* 1.36.1), just as a giant hero is said to have appeared during the battle of Marathon ten years earlier (Herodotus *Histories* 6.117).

645 For "Aias's Isle," see the note on line 325.

689–90 The goddess Earth is invoked because she contains the underworld. Hermes in this context is Psychopompus (escort of souls). Hades/Aïdoneus, brother of Zeus and king of the underworld, is the third deity addressed. He is named at lines 710 and 749.

736 Ships with three decks of oars are triremes.

749–51 For Hades, see the note on lines 689–90. The difficulty of escaping the underworld is commonplace in classical literature. Compare with Vergil *Aeneid* 6.126–29: "The descent to Avernus is easy; the doors of black Dis stand open day and night. But to retrace your steps and escape to the upper air—this is the trouble, this the labor."

796 For the Bactrians, see the note on line 324.

812 According to Herodotus, Xerxes has the Hellespont lashed and cursed after a storm destroys his first bridge. He also has a pair of fetters thrown into it and declares himself its "master," as if it were his slave (*Histories* 7.35).

815 Poseidon is god of the sea. The ghost of Dareius suggests that, by building the bridge and linking Europe and Asia, Xerxes is usurping Poseidon's prerogative.

831–52 Medos here is the mythical eponymous founder of the Medes. Later sources mention a son of Medea named Medos who goes on to establish the Median people (Diodorus Siculus *Historical Library* 4.55.5–56.1; [Apollodorus] *Library* 1.9.28). The second king is not named. Cyrus the Great (559–530 BC) was the first Achaemenid king of Persia. His son was Cambyses II (530–522 BC) who conquered Egypt. In 522 an imposter whom Herodotus identifies as Smerdis (instead of Mardos) posed as Cambyses' brother and briefly assumed the throne (*Histories* 3.61–79). Herodotus names Intaphernes as the slayer of the imposter, and it is likely that Aeschylus here confuses his name with the more familiar Artaphernes. Editors usually obelize the line (847–48; 778 in the Greek) which lists Maraphis as the sixth king and Artaphernes as the seventh because no other source mentions them. I regard the line as authentic; Aeschylus is portraying the Persian court as full of intrigue. He takes pains to portray Dareius's reign (522–485 BC) as tranquil and, by describing the period preceding it as tumultuous, casts its length and successes into relief.

875–99 Xerxes left troops behind under Mardonius to attempt to salvage the campaign. In the summer of 478 BC, an allied Greek army soundly defeated them at Plataia, a plain near Thebes (see Herodotus *Histories* 9.26–75). Dareius here "foretells" the battle.

893 "Doric spears" either refers to Greek soldiers in general (see the note on line 192) or emphasizes the Spartans' participation in the battle.

943–48 The Halys was regarded as the western boundary of the Persian Empire. The catalog (943–66) of Dareius's conquests begins here with cities on the mainland in the vicinity of Thrace.

949–54 The catalog of conquests sweeps eastward to cities along the Hellespont, the Propontis (the Sea of Marmara), and the Pontos (the Black Sea).

955–66 The chorus makes a forced distinction between islands closer to (955–60) and farther from (961–66) Asia Minor. Whereas Lesbos, Samos, and Chios are quite close to the coast, the rest of the islands mentioned in antistrophe C are farther out in the Aegean. The southern tip of Andros is quite close to Tenos (modern-day Tinos). Though grouped in strophe D with islands "removed" from Asia Minor, Cyprus is in fact quite near to the coast; Aeschylus mentions it here to round out the catalog with three cities on it—Paphos, Soli, and Salamis, a colony founded by its namesake island (see the note on line 284).

1004 The Mariandyni inhabited the southwestern shore of the Black Sea. They were renowned for their dirges and "annually lamented Mariandynus, or Bromus, a young man who was supposed to have disappeared when fetching water for the harvesters, or while hunting" (Garvie 2009, 347n935–40).

1015 Like his mother (182) and the chorus (607), Xerxes refers to Greeks in general as "Ionians."

1021–59 See the note on lines 20–62.

1026 The Phoenicians were renowned for seamanship and contributed three hundred ships to the Persian armada (Herodotus *Histories* 7.78).

1040 "The faithful Eye" refers to the possibly fictitious Persian functionary known as the "Eye of the King."

1049 The call referred to here is that of the Eurasian wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*), a subspecies of woodpecker that owes its name to the ability to rotate its head 180 degrees. It most often travels at night and its call sounds like "kew-kew-kdew-kew."

1091 For the wryneck, see the note on line 1049.

1093 The chorus of Theban women in *Seven against Thebes* also "rows" its arms in lamentation (864–65). The context there suggests that the gesture helps to convey the souls of the dead to the afterlife, as if the souls are on board a ship.

1099 For the Mysians, see the note on line 57. Garvie explains that the chorus's Mysian manner of grieving "serves to describe oriental lamentation in general" (2009, 367n 1054–58).

1119 For "Warships with triple-banks of oars," see the note on line 736.

Seven against Thebes

1 In Greek myth, Cadmus, son of the king of Tyre, Agenor, founds Thebes in the place where a prophecy uttered by Apollo at Delphi has specified: Cadmus is told to follow a

white cow until it lies down. The city was originally called Cadmeia and then was refounded as Thebes by the kings Amiphon and Zethus. In tragedy the citizens of Thebes are more often referred to as Cadmeans than Thebans.

2–5 The helm of the ship imagined here is a rudder at the stern. Thus the captain sits in the rear rather than the front of the ship to steer it. "Ship of state" imagery is especially prominent in this play; see lines 68–71, 111–115, 188–90, 798–802, 1071–72.

10 There is no evidence beyond this line and an inference drawn from it in the scholia to attest to an actual Theban cult of Zeus the Defender (*Alexētērios*).

25–33 The seer uses auspicy, or divination by the flight or calls or birds, rather than a method involving burned offerings, to predict the final onslaught of the Argive invaders. As burned offerings were prevalent in Aeschylus's day, Aeschylus felt compelled to specify that the divination did not involve fire. Teiresias is the seer summoned in the Theban plays of Sophocles and Euripides, but no name is given here.

43 The seven leaders of the Argive troops are introduced one by one and in detail during the seven-paired-shields scene (332–726).

49–50 The Argive leaders use the oath-formula, swearing by *X* gods to do *Y* things. Ares, the god of battle-rage, is closely associated with Thebes. He is the father of the serpent whom Cadmus slays at the river Ismenos before founding the city, and he is the father, by Aphrodite, of Harmonia, whom Cadmus takes as his queen. Enyo is a goddess of war and a counterpart of Ares. She is associated, in particular, with the destruction of cities. Terror (Phobos) is Ares' son.

56 Adrastus, king of Argos, married one of his daughters to Eteocles' brother Polyneices. He undertakes to raise an army to set Polyneices on the throne of Thebes but does not participate in combat.

77 Oedipus curses his sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, when they disrespect him. This curse—that they would divide their patrimony by means of a Scythian arbiter (iron)—gives rise to the Fury who will fulfill it. The Furies are female deities, usually winged, clothed in hunting garb, with snakes twined in their hair. They avenge kin-killing and unfilial conduct.

105 For Ares and Thebes, see the note on lines 49–50.

121–22 Athena is the goddess of war, among other things. The origin of her cult-title "Pallas" is contested—whether originally Athena's sister, friend, or enemy, Pallas is killed in every account by the goddess who then takes the title for herself. After impregnating and then swallowing the goddess Metis, Zeus "gives birth" to Athena when she springs armed and fully mature from his head.

123–24 Poseidon is a god of violent forces, such as the sea, horses, and earthquakes. In art he is a fully adult bearded male like Zeus. The trident is his distinguishing attribute.

125–26 For Ares and Thebes, see the note on lines 49–50.

126–27 Kypris is Aphrodite of Cyprus. She is the mother of Harmonia, Cadmus's wife, and thus, the chorus assumes, has a stake in his city's survival.

130–32 The Lycian lord is Apollo. The origin of the cult-title "Lycian" is uncertain, but there is wordplay in the original—the chorus entreats the Lycian god to be *lykeios* (wolfish) to its enemies. Leto's maiden daughter is Artemis, a virgin huntress goddess, usually accoutred, like her brother, with a bow.

147–48 "Onka" appears to be a local (Theban) cult-title for Athena; see line 481. The set of gates nearest to her shrine bore her name.

190 The captain would be abandoning control of the ship by running to the prow; see the note on lines 2–5.

254–55 In myth Dirce is the wife of King Lycus, who usurps the throne from the Labdacids (the family to which Laius and his descendants belong). She is a devotee of Dionysus, who causes the river that bears her name to spring from the place where she dies. The Ismenos has its source in the foothills of Mount Cithaeron and flows east past Thebes. According to legend, it takes its name from the son of Amphion; see the note on line 1.

270–331 In this nightmare ode the chorus of Theban women envisions the fall of Thebes and their reduction to servitude. Aeschylus makes no attempt to conceal his allusion to the fall of Troy—an event that, though later in mythological chronology, was recounted in epic material that predated this tragedy by several hundred years. As Hutchinson puts it, "As we contemplate the fall of Thebes, we must think of the fall of Troy" (1985, 89–92nn287–368).

283 For Dirce, see the note on lines 254–55.

284–85 One of Poseidon's stock epithets is "earth-holder"—he "holds" the earth up, as if it were floating on the sea. Daughter of Ouranos and Ge, Tethys was one of the Titans, the generation of gods that preceded the Olympians. To Oceanos, her brother and husband, she bore thousands of female water deities more often called the Oceanides but here referred to by a matronymic as "Tethydes" or "daughters of Tethys."

332–728 The seven-paired-shields scene contains seven roughly symmetrical groups of speeches in which the scout describes an Argive leader and Eteocles responds: 338–91, 392–431, 432–64, 465–511, 512–61, 562–629, 630–81. The chorus briefly comments on the first six of the exchanges. In each of his responses, Eteocles practices a form of divination called *cledonomancy,* which is the appropriation and manipulation of unintended word omens. In brief, he uses the words and images in the scout's account of the Argive leaders to foretell (and, in a sense, cause) their deaths.

Euripides pokes fun at the length and artificiality of this scene. When approached by a scout with information about the Argive leaders, his Eteocles states, "It would be a great waste of time to name each of them / while the enemy is camped under our very walls" (*Phoenissae* 751–52).

340 Like Polyneices, Tydeus has married a daughter of Adrastus. He is the father of the Homeric hero Diomedes.

341 "Gate of Proitos": Proitos, a legendary Theban, was the father of Locrus, who assisted Amphion and Zethus in the refounding of Thebes. His gate was located in the east wall of the city.

347 "The son of Oikles" is an epic-style patronymic for the seer and Argive leader Amphiaraus. The scout recounts his disputes with his fellow Argive leaders Tydeus and Polyneices at lines 570–600.

395 The "shining" or Electran gate was located in the south wall of the city.

422 Artemis Before-the-Portal is Artemis Prostateria; her shrines were placed before entryways.

436 The Neistan gate was located in the west wall of the city.

448 Megareus is the son of the same Kreon who is king of Thebes in Sophocles' *Antigone*. He is thus the nephew of Oedipus's former wife Iocasta and the cousin of Eteocles. After slaying the serpent of Ares, Cadmus is told by Athena to sow the serpent's teeth in the soil. A number of armed men (known as the *Spartoi* or "Sown Men") emerge and fight until only seven remain. The survivors are the patriarchs of the autochthonous families of Thebes, and Kreon and Megareus are descended from one of them.

466 For Onkan, see the note on lines 147–48; for Pallas, 121–22. The Onkan gate was located in the south wall of the city.

481 For Athena-Onka, see the note on lines 147–48.

491 Hermes is functioning here either as *hēgemonios* ("the guide") or as *eriounes* ("the luck-bringer").

496 The son of Ge and Tartarus, Typhon was a gigantic monster with hundreds of dragon heads on his arms, hissing serpents on his underside, wings all over his body, and eyes that shot fire. Ge sent him to attack Zeus as punishment for imprisoning the Titans within her. After defeating Typhon, Zeus trapped him under Mount Etna.

513–15 "Gate of Boreas": The gate of the north wind was located on the north side of the city. The son of Zeus and Antiope, Amphion refounded Cadmeia as Thebes by levitating the stones for the walls into place with the sound of his lyre. He and his brother Zethus were worshipped in Thebes, and "the sepulcher / of Amphion" (514–15) was most likely their cult-center.

520 The mother of Parthenopaios is Atalanta, a huntress like the goddess Artemis. She delivers the fatal blow to the Calydonian boar and becomes a lover of the hero Meleager.

524 Partheno-paios means "maiden-child."

525 A Gorgon is a winged female monster with fangs and bulging eyes. According to legend, anyone who looks upon her will be overcome with fear.

529–33 The Sphinx was a monster, a lioness with the head of a human female; her name means "strangler." She held Thebes hostage until Oedipus was able to answer her famous riddle: "what goes on four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three in the evening?" Parthenopaios carries her on his shield as a figure inimical to Thebes.

564 The Gate of Omolos was located in the east wall of the city.

571–72 Polyneices' name means "much" (*polu-*) "strife" (*neikos*).

660–61 For Polyneices' name, see the note on lines 571–72.

735–36 According to legend the Chalybes invented iron (Callimachus *Causes* frag. 110.44–48). They are identified as a tribe in Scythia, an ill-defined area that included contemporary Kazakhstan, Ukraine, southern Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and eastern Poland (scholion on Apollonius of Rhodes 2.373–76a).

750–52 When temporarily driven out of Thebes, Laius offends his host Atreus, king of Mycenae, by taking advantage of Atreus's son Chrysippus. Laius goes to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi and asks three times what he can do to purify himself of the guilt he has incurred. Each time he is told that he can save Thebes by dying childless. Thebes is still standing at the end of this play but is destroyed a generation later by the *Epigoni* (or "descendants" of the Seven).

780 The "flesh-eating, flying beast" is the Sphinx; see the note on lines 529–33.

793 For the Fury, see the note on line 77.

806 Laius's "mistake" is more likely his fathering of Oedipus than his affair with Chrysippus; see the note on lines 750–52.

831–32 Eteocles' name means true (*eteo-*) renown (*kleos*). For Polyneices' name, see the note on lines 571–72.

839 Maenads are ecstatic female followers of Dionysus. They dress in wild-animals' skins and carry a pinecone wand called a *thyrsus*.

857–58 The context here suggests the "rowing" gesture helps to convey the souls of the dead to the afterlife, as if they are on board a ship. The chorus of Persian elders also "rows" its arms in lamentation (*Persians* 1093).

860 The Lake of Acheron divides the world of the living from that of the dead. In many depictions Charon the ferryman conveys the souls of the dead to the farside in a boat.

864–68 The awkward introduction of Antigone and Ismene here, ninety lines before they first speak at line 954, is an interpolation. These sisters of Polyneices and Eteocles did not appear in the original play. The lines were interpolated sometime in the fourth century BC, most likely for a revival production for which the play was performed without the preceding plays in the trilogy, *Laius* and *Oedipus*.

892 The brothers strike each other on the *euonymōn* (favorably named) side. The left side of anything was considered unlucky or at least less lucky than the right. Its euphemistic name was intended to ward off any evil influence that might arise from identifying something as being on the left.

954–89 This series of exchanges in half lines, we assume, was originally assigned to the chorus.

973 The thrice-repeated acts of violence refer to the sufferings of three generations of the Laius family: Oedipus's patricide, Oedipus's self-blinding, and Eteocles and Polyneices' fratricide; see Sommerstein 2008, 261n148. This line takes on more resonance when one considers that it occurs toward the end of the third play in a trilogy that portrays all three generations of the house of Laius.

990–1072 These lines also were interpolated sometime in the fourth century BC.

Suppliants

1 As god of suppliants, Zeus is Aphiktōr (as here) or, more commonly, Hikesios. The shrine of any deity served as sanctuary for fugitives who were often but not necessarily criminals; hence the Danaids' protestation of their innocence in lines 7–9. In this context suppliants are asylum seekers and inviolate so long as they remain on the grounds of the shrine. According to Greek custom, anyone who forcibly removes them is subject to punishment by Zeus. As he grew up with different customs, the Egyptian herald has no reverence for the sanctuary (939–40).

15 The game referred to is *pessoi* (pebbles), in which a roll of dice determines how many spaces opposing dark and light colored stones could move across a game board.

20 The "gadfly-driven / Cow" is Io who, though she does not appear in the play, is mentioned so often that she serves as a kind of protagonist in absentia. Io is born in Argos the daughter of the river god Inachus. While Zeus is making love to Io, Hera descends in the hope of catching him in the act. Though in some accounts Zeus then transforms Io into a white heifer and offers it as a gift to Hera to conceal his affair, in

Aeschylus's version it is Hera who transforms her as punishment (323). Hera then sets Argus Panoptes, a giant with eyes placed all over his body, to keep watch over her. He is able to keep perpetual guard because he closes only a few eyes at a time to sleep. At the behest of Zeus, Hermes slays Argus and thereby acquires the epithet Argeiphontes (Argus slayer). Hera then sends a gadfly to sting the heifer, which runs wild from Argos all the way through Asia Minor to the Nile Delta. Zeus here makes love to Io, and she regains human form.

23–25 Suppliants held a wool-wound bough to indicate their wish for protection.

30–32 The "dwellers in grave and tomb" are deceased heroes who, as chthonic deities, have influence around the sites of their burial. Pausanias informs us that "there is [in the city of Argos] a sanctuary of Zeus the Savior near the tomb of Danaus and the cenotaph of the Argives who died at Troy or while returning home" (*Description of Greece* 2.29.6).

46–47 Themis is a personification of the civilizing forces (customs, traditions, etc.) that gathered the human race into communities. The Danaids contend that Themis would deplore their sexual union with their cousins (the sons of Aegyptus) as incest.

51 "Our foremost ancestress" is Io; see the note on line 20.

56–57 Epaphos means "touch" or "caress." He is also known as Apis, an Egyptian bull deity. This deity is not to be confused with the healer and son of Apollo introduced in lines 280–91. Epaphos founds the Egyptian city of Memphis and takes a wife, also named Memphis.

70–79 In Western literature, the nightingale becomes a symbol of poetry, in particular a symbol of lament. According to tradition, King Tereus of Thrace, while escorting his wife Procne's sister, Philomela, back to his palace, rapes the girl and cuts out her tongue to prevent her from accusing him. Philomela weaves a tapestry to show her sister the crime and, in revenge, Procne kills her son Itylus and feeds him to Tereus. Tereus chases Philomela and Procne until the gods transform them all into birds: Tereus into a hawk; Philomela, a swallow; and Procne, a nightingale forever grieving her son. In later sources Philomela is the nightingale and her sister the swallow.

81 "Eastern" is "Ionian" in the Greek, a musical mode that is associated with lament.

90 "Mist-Shrouded Lands" is a name for Egypt. Apollonius of Rhodes uses the same name (*Aeria gē*) in the *Argonautika* (4.267). Seafarers traveling to Egypt, it seems, often encountered mists covering the coastline.

99–101 An altar served as sanctuary for criminals, deserters, and other kinds of fugitives; see the note on line 1. The Danaids imply that, since they do not belong to any of these dubious categories, they should have even more right to claim protection.

128–131=136–139: The chorus assumes that the region they are in is named Apia after the Egyptian god Apis (see the note on lines 56–57) and that it will therefore understand the language they are speaking (which, by dramatic license, is Greek; Sommerstein 2008, 303n22). Pelasgos attributes the name "Apia" to a different Apis (280–91). "Ox-humped" (128=136) is my attempt to translate wordplay—the adjective *boūnin* in the original means "hilly" but suggests "ox" (*boūs*). Like the chorus in *Persians,* the Danaids refer to their native tongue as "barbaric" (129=137). "My muslin veil, my gorgeous veil from Tyre" (131=139): Phoenicia and Tyre (Phoenicia's major port) were

famous in the Mediterranean region for dyestuffs, in particular purple dye from the shell of the murex sea-snail.

149–54 Athena may be the virgin daughter of Zeus in question. In *Seven* she is repeatedly invoked to prevent the walls from being violated (121–22, 144–48, 481–84), and she may serve an analogous function here. Artemis, however, is just as likely a candidate (Sommerstein 2008, 307n31–33). The Danaids call on her later in the play to bless the Argives with many children (727–30) and do, once, ask her to keep them from "Kytherea's goal" (1088–89).

168=180 The "queen of heaven" is Hera, notorious for her persecution of her husband Zeus's lovers.

219–36 Within the boundary of the shared shrine (*koinobōmia*) there is an altar of Zeus (which features an eagle), Apollo, Poseidon (who is holding a trident), and Hermes. The text of the stichomythia (line-by-line dialogue) is missing several lines. I have inserted my own supplements in brackets (225, 227). At lines 229–30 it seemed best to settle on a couplet, though the lines were originally separated by a response from the chorus.

235 The Egyptian Hermes is Thoth, often depicted with the head of an ibis. Among other roles, the Greek Hermes serves as messenger of the gods.

268–77 The name "Palaichthon" means "old soil." The Pelasgians are a prehistorical and pre-Hellenic race subject to much speculation. Their name and the name "Pelasgos" have been derived from *pelargos* (stork), *pelas gē* (neighboring land), and *pelag-skoi* (flat land or sea inhabitants). According to Pelasgos, Pelasgia, which he also calls Argos, includes all of east Greece from the north of Thessaly to Nauplion in the Peloponnese, where the Danaids supposedly landed. Thucydides informs us that a region called Pelasgia was the largest in the time before Hellen, son of Deukalion, gave the name "Hellas" to Greece (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.3).

For the Strymon, see note on *Persians* 515–45. The Perrhaebians were a tribe in northern Thessaly, and the Pindus is a mountain range running south from the modern-day border of Greece with Albania to the northern Peloponnese. Paeonia, which extended from the Axios River valley, made up the extreme northeast edge of modern Greece and all of modern Macedonia. Dodona is in Epirus in northwestern Greece and is best known for its shrine to Zeus and its oracular oak tree.

280–91 Like Asclepius, another son of Apollo, Apis is a healer. In other accounts he has different parentage and becomes the Egyptian god Serapis upon his death. The city of Naupactus was and is on the north shore of the Straits of Lepanto in the Corinthian Gulf. Apia, the region named after Apis, is coextensive with the region that Pelasgos also calls Argos and Pelasgia.

298 The "Prolific Cow" is Io; see note on line 20.

304–13 Kyprian Aphrodite is Aphrodite of Cyprus. Aethiopia is a vague region stretching along the extreme eastern, southern, and western margin of ancient Greek geography; its inhabitants are dark skinned and included, among others, the peoples of inner Africa (Homer *Odyssey* 1.22–24; [Aeschylus] *Prometheus Bound* 808–9; Herodotus *Histories* 7.70). The ancients imagined that the Amazons resided in Scythia. The etymology *a-mazon* (no-breast) derives from the legend that they would remove their

breasts to be able to shoot their bows more freely. In the Western imagination they have always been on the fringes of the known world; New World cartographers put them in the jungles of South America (hence the "Amazon" river).

327–29 The all-observing herdsman is Argus Panoptes ("all eyes"); see the note on line 20.

332 The chorus uses the Greek word for gadfly (*oistros*), though the audience is meant to assume that the chorus uses the Egyptian word.

335 Canopus is an ancient Egyptian seaport located in the Nile Delta. For Memphis, located farther up the Nile, see note on *Persians* 39. There is an anachronism here, as Io's son Epaphos is traditionally credited with founding Memphis.

338–47 For Epaphos and Caress, see the note on lines 56–57. Lybia, Epaphos's daughter, is the founder of the eponymous region. She is the mother of Belus by Poseidon. Belus in turn begets Aegyptus and Danaus (13). The former has fifty sons; the latter, fifty daughters known as the Danaids, who are the protagonists of this play (and represented by the twelve-member chorus).

385 Justice here is Themis; see the note on lines 46–47. The title "Klarian" most likely comes from *klarioi,* a word for "suppliant boughs," and thus refers to Zeus in his capacity as protector of suppliants.

434 Zeus Homaimos, god of kin, presides over relations between those who share the same blood, both within a domestic setting and outside it.

484 Zeus Ktesios, god of wealth and chattels, was primarily a household god, presiding over the pantry and storage rooms.

549 The rivers Nile and Inachus recall by way of metonymy Egypt and Argos, respectively.

599–607 Like the Dardanelles (see the note on *Persians* 74–79), the Bosporus is a strait that divides Europe from Asia. The chorus uses a common folk-etymology for the name: Io, a cow, by crossing the strait, gives it the name *bous* (cow) plus *poros* (crossing), like the British Ox-ford. Phrygia was in west-central Asia Minor, and Mysia in northwest Asia Minor along the southern coast of the Sea of Marmara. Teuthras is a mythical Mysian king, and the city named after him was most likely in the northern coastal area. Lydia was in western Asia Minor just east of the coastal Ionian settlements, and Pamphylia was in southern Asia Minor, northwest of Cyprus. For Cilicia, see the note on *Persians* 346. The "grain-famed land of Aphrodite" is the island Cyprus. Thus, Io crosses from Europe to Asia at the Bosporus, travels south through western Asia Minor, swims to Cyprus and then swims to Egypt (608–12).

633 For Epaphos, see the note on lines 56–77.

681 "Guest-friend Zeus" is Zeus Xenios, who punishes breaches of the hospitality code.

685 As god of war, Ares is an uncontrollable destructive force. He figures later in this ode at lines 714 and 731–34.

687 For Pelasgia, see the note on lines 268–77.

727 During the classical period, Artemis was identified with Hecate in Athens, and they were invoked as a joint divinity of childbirth and fertility.

739 "The power of the wolf" refers to Lykeian Apollo; see the note on *Seven against Thebes* 130–32. Pausanias informs us that "[The mythical Argive king] Danaus dedicated . . . wooden images of Zeus and Artemis in the temple of Apollon Lykios in the city of Argos" (*Description of Greece* 2.19.7).

841 For Apia, see the notes on lines 128=136 and 280–91.

854 Hades, king of the underworld, is here imagined as a bridegroom: the Danaids would prefer to be "brides of death" rather than marry the sons of Aegyptus. For more on "bride of death" imagery, see Rehm 1994.

871 For the wryneck and its call, see the note on *Persians* 1049.

920–21 Son of Zeus and Laodamia, Sarpedon was a prominent Trojan ally during the Trojan War. His grave is located in Cilicia (southern Asia Minor) at the mouth of the Calcydanus on a spit of land that projects east into the Aegean. The wind blowing north and west from Syria might blow a ship upon it.

1081 The Erasinos River has its sources east of Tegea in the central Peloponnese and flows into the Gulf of Argos near Lerna.

1088–90 Artemis is a virgin goddess who presides over a female's premarital and childbearing years. Aphrodite takes the title "Kytherea" from the island Kythera in the Aegean, near which she was conceived. For Hades as a bridegroom, see line 854 and its note. For Kypris, see the notes on lines 304–13 and 599–607.

1122 "Deprive us of" translates the Greek *aposterein* (related to "sterile" in English). This verb underscores the fact that the Danaids are praying that they do not *suffer* marriage —an event that ancient Greek girls traditionally looked forward to as the most important event in their lives (Sommerstein 2008, 428–29n223).

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